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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



February 2012

Vol. 117, No. 1

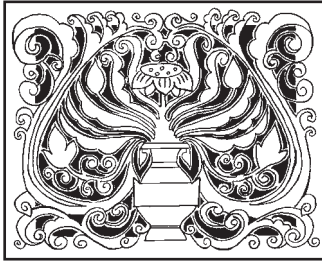


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Vol. 117, No. 2
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Amrita Kalasha

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INTERNET EDITION AT:

www.advaitaashrama.org

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175TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Everyone who helps even a little towards spreading the wonderful, life-giving message of Sri Ramakrishna is blessed—for he or she is bringing peace without as well as within. While India seeks to become a world power, it is our pride that a unique personality was born in India 175 years ago, and it is our bounden duty to rally around him in order to rise, become successful, live in harmony and attain supreme peace.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, (Chennai Math for short) is a spiritual centre of distinction, having been blessed by the visit of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Ramakrishnananda, one of the eminent spiritual luminaries and a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, founded this Math. Several other distinguished direct disciples like Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, Abhedananda, and others have sanctified the Math by their visits. Furthermore, numerous renowned personalities from Chennai in particular and Tamil Nadu in general have contributed to the eminence of the Math.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, takes pride in celebrating the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna (2011-12) through various programmes. One such programme is the 'Satsanga in every home' through which spirituality is sought to be ushered into the homes of the devotees through Satsangas held weekly/fortnightly/monthly. The celebrations will culminate with spiritual and cultural programmes from 22nd to 26th February 2012 at the Chennai Math.

The ardent desire of the devotees of Chennai to have a grand temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna was fulfilled with the consecration of a Universal Temple at the Chennai Math in February 2000. The culmination of the 175th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna in February 2012 also coincides with the completion of 12 years since the consecration of the Universal Temple at Chennai Math.

The Universal Temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna and its surroundings need renovation and the 175th Birth Anniversary celebration is a fitting occasion to carry this out and re-dedicate it to Sri Ramakrishna in all its splendour and glory in February 2012. The estimated cost of the renovation is Rs. 82.00 lacs as per details below:

1. Universal Temple renovation:	Rs. 07.00 lacs
2. Painting of the Universal Temple:	Rs. 06.00 lacs
3. Old Temple renovation: (It's a 100-year old building)	Rs. 17.00 lacs
4. Painting of the Old Temple:	Rs. 03.00 lacs
5. Repairing of the compound wall around the Math premises:	Rs. 08.00 lacs
6. Repaving the courtyards and the pathways:	Rs. 22.00 lacs
7. Miscellaneous expenses:	Rs. 04.00 lacs
8. Jayanti Celebrations:	Rs. 15.00 lacs
Total: Rs. 82.00 lacs	

We solicit your kind donation for carrying out the renovation work. Please join hands with us in re-dedicating ourselves to Sri Ramakrishna on the auspicious occasion of his 175th Birth Anniversary celebrations. Donations may be made by Cheque/DD in favour of 'Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai' and sent to Sri Ramakrishna Math at the address given below. Donations are eligible for tax exemption under Section 80-G of the Indian Income Tax Act.

Donations can also be made online at www.chennaiamath.org by selecting the category 'Sri Ramakrishna 175'. For direct transfer to Bank, please contact us for IFSC/Swift code details by email. International donations are welcome.

May Sri Ramakrishna bless us all.

Swami Gautamananda
Swami Gautamananda
(Adhyaksha)



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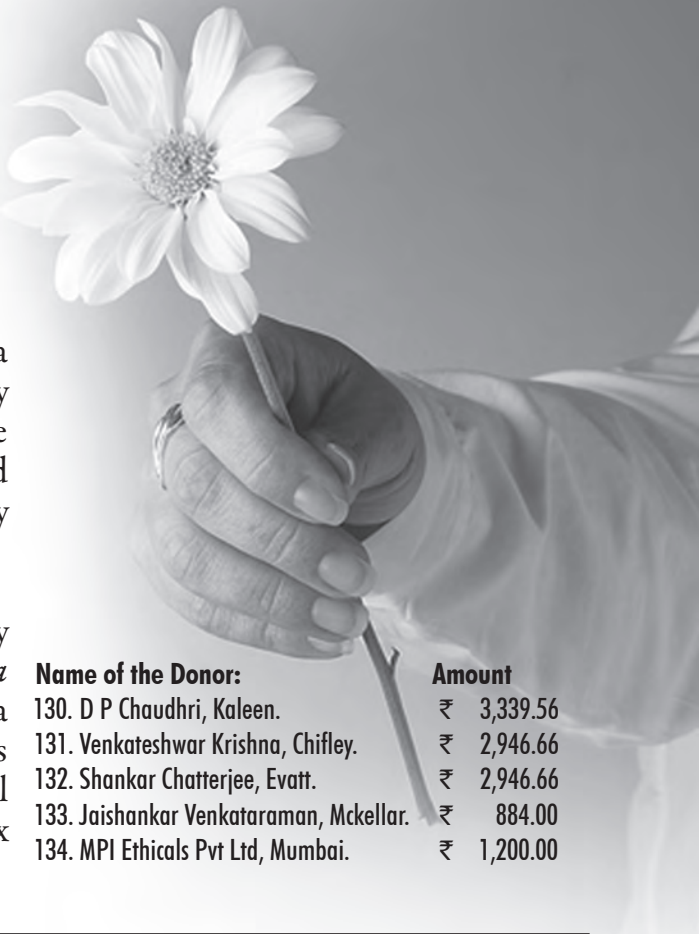
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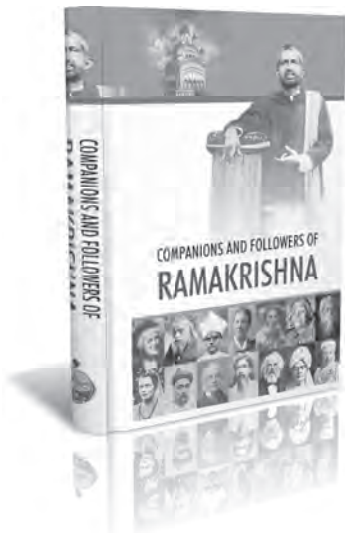


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This book contains brief information about 1273 persons who were either companions or followers of Ramakrishna. Some of them do not categorically belong to these two groups and can be said to be mere acquaintances. Its importance lies in the fact that, along with the important ones it also keeps before us information about many a lesser known characters from Ramakrishna's life as well as about his later followers. Released on the occasion of the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna it will facilitate serious readers who want to know especially about the lesser-known characters which find mention in Ramakrishna's literature as well as tradition.



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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*



The Boundless Within

February 2012
Vol. 117, No. 2

तिलेषु तैलं दधिनीव सर्पिरापः स्रोतःस्वरणीषु चाग्निः ।
एवमात्माऽऽत्मनि गृह्यतेऽसौ सत्येनैनं तपसा योऽनुपश्यति ॥

As oil in the sesame seed, butter in the curd, water in the stream, fire in the *arani* wood, so is the Atman in one's self to be discovered by one who realizes It through truth and tapasya.

(*Brahma Upanishad*, 17)

लये संबोधयेच्चित्तं विक्षिप्तं शमयेत्पुनः । सकषायं विजानीयात्समप्राप्तं न चालयेत् ॥
नास्वादयेत्सुखं तत्र निःसङ्गः प्रज्ञया भवेत् । निश्चलं निश्चरच्चित्तमेकीकुर्यात्प्रयत्नतः ॥

One should wake up the mind merged in sleep; one should bring the dispersed mind into tranquillity again; one should know when the mind is tinged with desire; one should not disturb the mind established in equipoise. One should not enjoy happiness in that state; but one should become unattached through discernment. When the mind established in steadiness wants to issue out, one should concentrate it with diligence.

(*Mandukya Upanishad Karika*, 3.44-5)

धनुर्गृहीत्वौपनिषदं महास्त्रं शरं ह्युपासानिशितं सन्धयीत ।
आयम्य तद्भावगतेन चेतसा लक्ष्यं तदेवाक्षरं सोम्य विद्धि ॥

Taking hold of the bow, the great weapon familiar in the Upanishads, one should fix on it an arrow sharpened with meditation. Drawing the string, O good-looking one, hit that very target that is the Imperishable with the mind absorbed in Its thought.

(*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.3)

THIS MONTH

Surmounting Crises outlines the unfolding struggle of humankind's freedom from the loop of the world, impelling the human heart towards God.

In his exhaustive study on Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Bhajanananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, shows in **Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – V** the spiritual ideal for this epoch.

Sri Ramakrishna sporadically and hilariously used English words with devotees. Swami Vimalatmananda, a monk at Belur Math, shows the extent of **Sri Ramakrishna's English**. The article first appeared in the September 2011 issue of *Udbodhan* and was translated into English by Mohit Ranjan Das of Kolkata.



Life in society has become difficult and challenging due to social growth and expansion. Swami Sandarshanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith,

Deoghar, writes about **The Changing World and Its Challenges**.

In the second part of **Holy Mother's Concern for Common Persons** Swami Tathagatananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, shows how Mother's love filled the vacuum in the lives of various persons and spiritually uplifted them.

Hermeneutics as a discipline is more active in today's academia, but even the best hermeneutical skills may not be adequate to interpret all of Sri Ramakrishna's

words. Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former head of the department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, presents a new paradigm in the concluding part of **Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta as the Emerging Mimamsa**.

In the third part of **Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels** Somenath Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, presents Swamiji's travels on the *SS Britannic* as well as the ship's history.



In the second part of **An Enquiry into the Strength of Law** Prof. N L Mitra discusses the relationship between law and morality as well as the injustices in investigation and prosecution. The author is a former director of the Bangalore Law College.



Surmounting Crises

WE OFTEN BELIEVE THAT we are the only ones singled out for the worst crises, but if we peer over our egocentric lives to the world around, we learn that many are facing crises and struggles worse than ours. When Arjuna had to face the terrible prospect of mass killing of friends and kinsmen on the battlefield, Bhagavan Sri Krishna did not teach Arjuna *pranayama*, or asanas, or rituals, or prayers, or ahimsa, but taught him the correct philosophy of life. Today we need such a philosophy and also one who embodies it to help us conquer crises.

Another constant complaint and belief about this world is that people are selfish. Nature, however, does not allow us to lead egocentric lives, it constantly draws us out to participate in the great plan of life. Living beings are social because every organism is designed to live in and interact with the world. Every human body and mind is thus constantly and inevitably subject to the dynamics of ego- and cosmo-centric forces. The former furthers individual welfare and safety, while the latter promotes altruism, community welfare, progress, and development. Human life and society are possible through the operation of both these forces, which are not random but operate under the domain of universal laws. All human knowledge—science, philosophy, psychology, religion, and so forth—is an attempt to understand the dynamics of these laws. As living beings participate in and are acted upon by laws, humankind has the rare distinction of intuitively grasping a glimmer of this knowledge. This is the basis of all types of jurisprudence,

which translates into civil, criminal, and corporate laws, and are constituted in every society. In religion these laws become ethics and morality; in science they become scientific laws and principles that matter obeys; in philosophy they become the enquiry into the nature of ‘existence’; in psychology they are functions and behaviours of human minds; in sociology they become the development and structure of societies.

These two forces or laws are universal, self-sustaining, and not random, otherwise we would be living meaninglessly in a meaningless universe. The universe, with its seen and unseen realms of myriad forms, has been created by these two forces. Yet, these mighty laws, which humans obtain only a glimpse of, are a mixture of the subconscious and the conscious. Our bodies and minds too comprise of subconscious and conscious forces. Does the knowledge of $E = mc^2$ become our inner experience and change our lives? Or, to put it humorously, do we explode like an atom bomb? We use and manipulate this knowledge in various applications, but it does not confer us spiritual enlightenment or make us free. This level of knowledge, vast and profound as it is, is termed *apara-vidya*, lower knowledge, in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. *Para*, higher, knowledge is knowledge of the immutable Reality.

Swami Turiyananda once had an extraordinary experience in Puri that throws light on the *apara-* and *para-vidya*. The swami was ill and sleeping when he felt that someone was trying to enter his body without permission. Immediately, the one who had always previously inhabited the


body got up and a terrible fight ensued. After fighting for a long time the original inhabitant defeated and drove away the stranger. The swami was half awake through the struggle and was able to watch the whole episode as if from a great distance. He later explained that that fight was the fight between an inner force and an outer force. If the inner force would have been defeated, the body would have died. He clarified further: 'But do not think that they are two different forces. They are like two concentric circles, the inner one trying to break the outer one.' And his supreme realization was: 'I, as a separate object, would witness the whole fun.' This is another example that we have a state of existence beyond the loop of these two universal forces.

During the last ten thousand years humankind has been rapidly developing civilizations all over the world. Life in society has to pass through many struggles; and the keener these challenges, the bigger the changes—through struggle human progress is hastened. If we consider the time humankind has taken to evolve till the present, billions of years seem a very long time indeed. The two forces that have been gradually evolving us have speeded up during the last few thousand years due to the intensification of human struggles and crises. Thus, trials and tribulations in human life have a purpose. The consequence of this progress is that we are coming out of narrow ideas of civilization and are now building a comprehensive one that keeps intact individual variations and that, at a deeper level of our being, we feel we are becoming freer, more knowledgeable, and better individuals. This also serves as a stern reminder that every person, without distinctions, is important to the general good of humanity and that one should help those who are in crisis. Holy Mother was the perfect embodiment of this ideal.

The loop of the forces is under laws and, as we have seen, a mixture of the subconscious and the

conscious. Turiyananda's experience shows that he was separate from this loop and yet conscious of it. This higher consciousness or *para-vidya* is also called super-consciousness. Just as we have an intuition of laws, similarly we have inklings and experiences of the higher consciousness. True, we live in the world, but we actually live on our cognitive levels. By following a long course of adherence to laws and with enough conscious struggles some people have achieved a higher cognitive level. This altered state of cognition generates great energy, creativity, imagination, ability and is a place of immense possibilities. This state is open to everyone because the higher mind is also within every human psyche. When struggles take a higher mode different from food, sleep, and sex, the person is on the way out of the loop of these two forces.

In order to access a higher state of consciousness, Swami Vivekananda says that we have to transcend law and become 'divine outlaws'. We learn from those who have succeeded in this endeavour that they had an ideal and a correct philosophy of life. The ideal has to be divine, for divinity is free from the bondages of laws. In this age a comprehensive ideal has been placed before humanity in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. The more we can internalize the ideal and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the higher shall our cognitive level rise.

Just as crises are inevitable in life, so is the need of an appropriate philosophy of life. Only then can we, like Arjuna, heroically stand and fight, and not flee from struggles and crises. As we begin breaking free from the loop of forces and reaching higher realms of consciousness, we can, like Turiyananda, 'witness the whole fun'. William Blake immortalized this idea in *Auguries of Innocence*: 'To see the world in a grain of sand / And heaven in a wild flower / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / And eternity in an hour.' 



Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – V

Swami Bhajanananda

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AS THE SPIRITUAL IDEAL OF THE MODERN AGE

Meaning of 'Ideal'

AT THE OUTSET we may note that a human ideal can be of two categories: subjective and objective. A subjective ideal is a person whom we want to emulate, a person who serves as a role model; he is the prototype, the mould in which we want to cast our lives. The objective ideal is a person who is the object of our love and adoration; we do not want to emulate him, for we know he is far superior to us. At the spiritual plane the objective ideal is known as one's *iṣṭa* or *iṣṭa-devata*, such as Shiva, Krishna, or Devi. When Swami Vivekananda spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as the ideal, he obviously meant both the subjective and objective ideals. There is not much difficulty in accepting

Sri Ramakrishna as the objective ideal, as millions of people adore him as their *iṣṭa-devata*.

Swami Vivekananda believed that Sri Ramakrishna could or should also serve as the subjective ideal for the modern man, particularly in India. In the course of a conversation Swamiji said: 'But take it from me, never did come to this earth such an all-perfect man as Shri Ramakrishna! In the utter darkness of the world, this great man is like the shining pillar of illumination in this age! And by his light alone will man now cross the ocean of Samsara!' ¹ In another context Swamiji said: 'Such a unique personality, such a synthesis of the utmost of Jnana, Yoga, Bhakti and Karma, has never

before appeared among mankind. ... He is the true disciple and follower of Sri Ramakrishna, whose character is perfect and all-sided like his. The formation of such a perfect character is the ideal of this age, and everyone should strive for that alone' (7.412).

Swamiji regarded Sri Ramakrishna as the ideal for Indians and also for the whole world. How can a person who had only the rudiments of education, who did not know anything about science or technology, and lived like a monk in a God-intoxicated condition in the precincts of a temple be regarded as an ideal for the modern people who idolize film stars, cricket players, politicians, populist leaders, and business magnates?

Before answering this question we have to understand what the term 'ideal' really means. An ideal is a symbol of perfection. Through the ideal we gain access to perfection. This means that none of the imperfect individuals of the world can be an ideal for humanity. Perfection cannot be found in the external world, which is ever-changing, full of imperfections, limitations, contradictions, and sufferings. Freedom from bondage to the world and attainment of absolute fearlessness, supreme knowledge, and everlasting joy and peace is what is meant by 'perfection'—*pūrṇata* in Vedānta. There is only one thing that fulfils all the above attributes of perfection, and that is the human's true Self, Atman-Brahman, which is of the nature of pure Consciousness. When a person realizes this ultimate Reality and becomes one with it, '*Brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*; a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman itself.'² He then becomes a symbol or personification of Brahman. The *Mundaka Upanishad* further states: 'When a person realizes that the whole life (*prāṇa*) is pervaded by the supreme Self, he enjoys the bliss of Atman even while engaged in outer activities. Such a person

is the greatest among the knowers of Brahman (*brahmavidāṁ varīṣṭhaḥ*)' (3.1.4). This description perfectly fits Sri Ramakrishna. Such a person alone can be considered to be the ideal of humanity. That is why Swami Vivekananda spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as the ideal for the modern world.

In the Shankarite Advaita tradition the ideal of a knower of Brahman is the *jīvanmukta*, the liberated-in-life. The description of a *jīvanmukta* given in Advaitic treatises indicates a person who regards the world as illusory and who moves about unaffected by and unconcerned about the world, somehow exhausting his *prārabdha* karma. Obviously, such a person is not suitable as an ideal for the modern world.

Sri Ramakrishna has given a new ideal of a knower of Brahman: the *vijñāni*. As already mentioned, a *vijñāni* is a person who, after the realization of the non-dual Brahman in *nirvikalpa* samadhi, comes back to the world and, seeing the immanent Brahman in all, serves all people looking upon them as God himself. The *vijñāni* does not reject the world as illusory, but lives in the world as a channel for the free flow of God's grace and serves suffering humanity seeing God in everybody.

Sri Ramakrishna himself has made clear the distinction between the *jīvanmukta* and the *vijñāni* in several contexts. On one occasion he said:

There are two classes of paramahamsas, one affirming the formless Reality and the other affirming God with form. Trailanga Swami believed in the formless Reality. Paramahamsas like him care for their own good alone; they feel satisfied if they themselves attain the goal.

But those paramahamsas who believe in God with form keep the love of God even after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, so that they may teach spiritual truth to others. ...

Some eat mangoes secretly and remove all trace of them by wiping their mouths with a towel. But some share the fruit with others. There are sages who, even after attaining Knowledge, work to help others and also to enjoy the Bliss of God in the company of devotees.³

The second type of paramahansa is the *vijñāni*. It is the *vijñāni* ideal represented by Sri Ramakrishna that Swami Vivekananda regarded as the ideal of the modern age.⁴ Here the word 'ideal' means 'prototype' or 'model'. This brings back the question we raised earlier: How can the *vijñāni* ideal embodied by Sri Ramakrishna be regarded as the ideal for the modern age, which is dominated by materialism, consumerism, competition, pursuit of sense pleasure, and various contradictions and conflicts? But Swamiji was a seer and he looked far into the future, beyond the turmoil of present society.

Four Global Trends

If we look at the present global human situation through newspaper headlines, what we get is a sombre picture of a world darkened by crime, violence, immorality, attack on women and children, corruption in high places, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, nuclear threat, and so on. These dark forces, however, are incapable of obstructing the progress of humanity. Humanity has moved from agricultural society through industrial society to knowledge society, and is now poised to take an 'existential leap' to spiritual society. Among the several thought currents animating the collective mind of humanity four deserve special mention here: dominance of science and technology, globalization of economy, neo-humanism, and upsurge of interest in spirituality.

Science is now no longer looked upon as the domain of specialists but is being accepted as the correct and normal way of knowing and doing

things. Science is only another name for the universal law of Truth. All economic activities, especially macroeconomic planning, business enterprises, and accounting are now based on scientific principles. With the rapid advancements of electronics, information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and other fields technology has now come to play an important role in the day-to-day lives of even common people.

Globalization of economy is breaking down the barriers separating people, nations, and races and is making them more and more interdependent. One distinctive feature of the new global economy is that it is knowledge-driven and is leveraged by human capital. Human resources have now become more important than financial or other material resources.

The third trend in world thought is a new type of humanism. Till recently humanism was motivated by compassion and sense of duty towards one's fellow beings. The new humanism is based on the recognition of the rights of people, especially marginalized people and disabled people, for livelihood, equality, and justice.

The fourth development in collective human awareness is an upsurge of interest in spirituality. Since spirituality forms an essential aspect of Hindu religion and tradition, the new widespread interest in spirituality is taken as a natural phenomenon in India. But in other parts of the world, where religions have emphasized faith and allegiance to religious institutions, the rise of interest in spirituality has been hailed as a 'spiritual revolution'.⁵ A recent poll conducted by *Newsweek* in the US has shown that 36 per cent of the Americans regard themselves as spiritual rather than religious. Millions of people have taken to the practice of meditation, yoga, Zen, Vipassana, and other spiritual disciplines. In fact, this fourth global trend has assumed the nature of a worldwide spiritual movement.

Meaning of Spirituality and Spiritual Life

Until fifty years ago spirituality had been considered an essential aspect of religion, and hence there was no need to define spirituality separately. But during the last three or four decades it has become customary to treat religion and spirituality as two different or distinct phenomena. The use of the term 'religion' is nowadays confined to a system of belief and conduct consisting of: (i) faith in a personal God, in a founder-prophet, and in a sacred scripture; (ii) acceptance of certain dogmatic assertions to be true, even if they are found to be not in accord with the truths discovered by science; and (iii) observance of certain rituals, customs, and so forth as well as identification with a religious institution and community.

What then is spirituality? Spirituality is now not only followed by millions of people but is also a major subject of discussion and study for psychologists, sociologists, neuroscientists, business executives, therapists, counsellors, and others. With such diversity of interest in spirituality it is only natural that different conceptions of spirituality exist. By now more than thirty definitions have been formulated. As a sample we give here a definition that originally appeared in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*: 'Spirituality, which comes from the Latin root *spiritus*, meaning "breath of life", is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.'⁶ A simpler definition would be: spirituality is a view of reality and a way of life centred on the Spirit.

This raises a basic question: What is meant by 'spirit'? The meaning of the term 'spirit' depends upon our understanding of the nature of human personality. There are two main conceptions of

human personality. In most of the systems of philosophy and religious traditions other than Hinduism, the human personality is regarded as dichotomous, that is, as consisting of only the body and the mind. The mind itself—or a higher dimension of it—is known as the 'soul' and 'spirit'. In this sense spiritual life is only a higher form of mental life.⁷ In India the ancient sages of the Upanishads discovered that the human personality has a trichotomous structure, that is, it consists of the body, the mind, and the Atman. The Atman is the true Self of the human being; it is of the nature of pure consciousness—*cit* or *caitanya*—which is the source of all the knowledge and happiness that a person experiences. Since the Atman is independent of the mind, it is ever pure, untouched by impurities and suffering, which belong to the mind. In this view the word 'spirit' should refer only to the Atman, which is the true Self of the human being. Therefore, according to this view, spiritual life is a way of life based on the awareness of one's own true nature as the Atman. The concept of the Atman is based on the most indubitable fact of one's own existence. As Acharya Shankara has pointed out, one may doubt anything else, but not one's own existence. It is on this most existential truth that spiritual life is based in the Hindu tradition.

The doctrine of the Atman is the one common thread uniting all the sects and philosophical schools in the Hindu tradition. The doctrine of God is only an extension of the doctrine of the Atman. In fact, this is the central principle in the ancient Upanishads and in the system of philosophy known as Vedanta. Investigation into the nature of the individual Atman led the Upanishadic sages to the discovery that the individual Atman or Self is an inseparable part or aspect of the supreme Self—Paramatman or Brahman—which is the ultimate Reality behind the universe. As the ultimate cause of the universe,

Brahman is also known as Ishvara, which may roughly, though not accurately, be translated as 'God'. Therefore, according to Vedanta, which is the sole living philosophy of Hindu religion, spiritual life may also be regarded as a way of life centred on the supreme Self. In other words, spiritual life is God-centred life, the word 'God' being understood either as the impersonal Absolute or the personal Ishvara.

Here one may point out an anomaly: our true nature may be Atman-Brahman, but in ordinary life we do not perceive this truth; we rather identify ourselves with the body and the mind, which we take to be our real nature. It was to explain this anomaly that later Vedantins introduced a third category: ignorance, known as *maya*, *ajñāna*, or *avidyā*. It is described as an inexplicable, mysterious power inherent in creation. Thus, although our true nature is Atman-Brahman, owing to ignorance this knowledge remains in a dormant or potential form. Spiritual life is an effort to remove this ignorance and realize one's true divine nature. As Swami Vivekananda has put it: spiritual life is the manifestation of one's potential divinity. This view is in accord with Sri Ramakrishna's view that, although God is present in all beings, in some people He manifests more and in some less.

In simpler terms we may define spiritual life in the following way: whereas ordinary life is a struggle to transform animal consciousness into human consciousness, spiritual life is a struggle to transform human consciousness into divine consciousness.

Awareness of oneself as the Spirit and Self-empowerment, seeing God in all and maintaining an attitude of love and service towards all, and acceptance of life as governed by cosmic forces—these are the three basic ingredients of spirituality or spiritual life.


(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.480.
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.9.
3. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 500–1.
4. For a detailed discussion on the *vijñāni* ideal see Swami Bhajanananda, 'Three Aspects of the Ramakrishna Ideal', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 87/3 (March 1982), 83–91.
5. Cf. Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Benjamin Seel, *The Spiritual Revolution* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005). Also, David N Elkins, *Spiritual Revolution: A Way Out* (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2010).
6. D N Elkins, L J Hedstrom, L L Hughes, J A Leaf, and C Saunders, 'Toward a Humanistic-Phenomenological Spirituality: Definition, Description, and Measurement', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 28/4 (Fall 1988), 10.
7. It may be mentioned here that the concept of a tripartite division of human personality prevailed among the early Christians up to the third century. St Paul, in his 'Epistles', distinguishes between psyche (mind) and pneuma (spirit). This doctrine was declared a heresy in one of the ecumenical councils in the fourth century.

Sri Ramakrishna holds the hope of salvation for everybody. For him there is not such thing as eternal damnation, because God resides in every being. There cannot be a being in whom God is not, in whom Divinity is not hiding itself, as it were, and waiting for its expression. Sri Ramakrishna asked people never to think of their sins but to think of the glories of God and of the way they might realize Him, and to have abiding faith in the ultimate victory of spiritual struggle. There is not a single soul for whom there is no ray of hope, for whom there is no prospect of God realization. This boundless faith in man is a most striking feature of Sri Ramakrishna's message.

—Swami Gambhirananda, in *A Bridge to Eternity*, 140



Sri Ramakrishna's English

Swami Vimalatmananda

ONE DAY SRI RAMAKRISHNA was seated on the small cot of his room and Narendra was on a mat spread on the floor. Guru and disciple were discussing various subjects. When the topic of philosophy came and Sri Ramakrishna was about to say something, Narendra silenced him saying: 'What do you know about philosophy? You are an illiterate person.' He used to argue in this way with Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna used to chuckle sweetly and say at this: 'I am not illiterate as Loren [Naren] makes me out to be. ... I am the knower of *akshara*.'¹

The ordinary meaning of *akshara* is 'word'. Sri Ramakrishna was not unacquainted with the Bengali alphabet, for his handwriting appeared like a beautifully set pearl necklace. He admitted he was able to understand a conversation held in Sanskrit; but could he do so in English? The answer is yes. M, the author of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, mentions numerous English words that the Master used while speaking

to devotees. Besides, from a very early age Sri Ramakrishna had a phenomenal memory and never forgot whatever he heard even once. Towards his later days in Dakshineswar, almost all the persons he interacted with knew English. These devotees used to sometimes casually utter English words while speaking Bengali, and hence he could remember them. Many of these words are vivid in many pages of the *Kathamrita*.

The metaphysical meaning of *akshara*, however, is different. *Akshara* in the Upanishads means Brahman. The word is *a-kshara*, that which does not decay or perish—imperishable. In the *Mundaka Upanishad* one finds Shaunaka, a great householder, approaching the rishi Angiras and respectfully inquiring: 'O adorable sir (what is that thing) which having been known, all this becomes known?'² Angiras replied that the knowers of the Vedas say there are two types of knowledge: *para*, higher, and *apara*, lower. 'Of these, the lower comprises the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda, the science of pronunciation, the

code of rituals, grammar, etymology, metre, and astrology. Then there is the higher (knowledge) by which is attained that *aksharam*, Imperishable' (1.1.5). Brahman is known only through higher knowledge, and when Brahman is known everything in the universe becomes known. By realizing Brahman Sri Ramakrishna became immensely rich in the ultimate knowledge; he was saturated with the consciousness of Brahman. Is it a matter of astonishment that he would be able to use a few English words so fluently while conversing?

Some English Words

Everyone is accustomed to using and hearing the words 'thank you'. Sri Ramakrishna had used these two words often with different people. As soon as he liked something, he did not hesitate to say 'thank you'. Sri Ramakrishna said 'thank you' to Vaidyanath, a Calcutta lawyer at Surendra Mitra's house,³ and also to Mahendra Goswami at Ishan Mukhopadhyay's house (371). At the Shyampukur House he said to Dr Mahendralal Sarkar 'give me a thank you' (854). Once, Sri Ramakrishna even gave a double 'thank you' to his dear disciple Narendra. The latter was telling M that he had been reading a book by Hamilton and quoted a sentence: 'A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion.' Sri Ramakrishna eagerly asked M: 'What does that mean?' Narendra explained the sentence in Bengali. The Master beamed with joy and said in English: 'Thank you! Thank you!' (278).

Many English words had found a place in the Bengali language even then, and Sri Ramakrishna used these English words in his conversations. 'Haven't you seen the trees on the *foot-path* along a street? They are fenced around as long as they are very young' (327). Sri Ramakrishna used to call the symbol of the Christians as 'cross': 'Once I went to Keshab's house to see the performance of a play called *Nava-Vrindavan*. They brought something

on the stage which they called the "*Cross*". Another actor sprinkled water, which they said was the "*Water of Peace*" (195). And above all: 'I am the engine and Thou art the *Engineer*' (209).

Sri Ramakrishna used the English word 'company' several times in his conversations. It referred to the East India Company, and Sri Ramakrishna's *campanir kagaj*, meant bonds issued by it. In the following two examples the word that Sri Ramakrishna used for 'government' was 'company'. 'What need have I to know how many houses and how many government securities Jadu Mallick possesses?' (482). 'Somehow or other, become acquainted with the master, even if you have to jump over the fence or take a few pushes from the servants. Then the master himself will tell you all about his houses and gardens and his government securities' (646).

'A *steamboat* not only crosses the water itself but carries many human beings with it' (857). Sri Ramakrishna used to pronounce 'screw' as 'iscrew': 'Once a ship sailed into the ocean. Suddenly its iron joints, nails, and *screws* fell out' (476). 'Many days ago, during an electric storm, a thunderbolt struck the Kali Temple. We saw that no injury had been done to the doors; only the points of the *screws* were broken. The doors are the body, and the passions—lust and so forth—are the *screws*' (659). 'When the doors and windows of a room are fastened with *screws*, how can a man get out?' (777).

Sri Ramakrishna frequently uttered some English words with ease; for instance, fever mixture, monument, photograph, steamer, judge, meeting, school, officer, office, signboard, deputy, museum, [Asiatic] Society, telegraph, [powder] magazine, exhibition, quinine, bank, water, aqua, refine, floor.

It is noticed that Sri Ramakrishna used more English words in his conversations with his better learned devotees: 'Don't think that this will

make you lose your *head*' (456). 'The dandy, all spick and span, his lips red from chewing betel-leaf, walks in the garden, cane in hand, and, plucking a flower, exclaims to his friend, "Ah! What a *beautiful* flower God has made!"' (624). 'If there is no special manifestation of power, then why is *Queen Victoria* so much honoured and respected?' (488). 'The pundit left the room. With a smile the Master said: "He has become *diluted* even in one day"' (ibid.). 'You see, he [Ram Mallick] called his wife crazy. Grief for the boy totally *diluted* him' (787). 'It is God alone who has planted in man's mind what the *Englishman* calls free will' (379). 'When you realize God, will you pray to Him, "O God, please grant that I may dig reservoirs, build roads, and found *hospitals* [pronounced *haspatal*] and *dispensaries*?"' (ibid.). 'You [Nilkantha] sang so much in the morning, and now you have taken the trouble to come here. But here everything is *honorary*' (599). 'Well, can you tell me why I feel so very anxious for all these and think about what one has realised and another has not and so on? They are mere *school-boys*.'⁴ 'Did the *young Bengal*, that you see, care for devotion and such other things?' (879). 'A fair of bliss—a veritable mart of the name of Hari—assembles there [Panihat] on that day; you "*Young Bengal*" have never seen such a thing. Let us go and witness it' (1169). 'Master (to a devotee): "Narendra doesn't *like* even you."⁵ 'Rakhal is now enjoying his *pension*' (715).

Sri Ramakrishna used the word 'lecture' many a time. He used this word first in the course of his conversation regarding the American preacher Mr Cook. 'Tell me, do you know of a certain Mr Cook who has come to Calcutta? Is it true that he is giving *lectures*?' (79). During the second visit to Sri Ramakrishna, M was sharply rebuked by the Master: 'That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people—giving *lectures* and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to

teach others? He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone' (80). Once Sri Ramakrishna said to Pratap Mazumder of the Brahmo Samaj: 'One can very well understand the inner feeling of a teacher of your Brahmo Samaj by hearing his preaching' (454)—he used the word 'lectures' for 'preaching'. He once said to pundit Shashadhar: 'You may deliver thousands of *lectures*, but they won't make the slightest impression on worldly people. ... Your *lectures* are not helping worldly people very much; and you will realize this by and by' (464–5). 'What will a man accomplish by mere *lectures* without the commission from God?' (466). Sri Ramakrishna once said to Vijaykrishna Goswami of the Brahmo Samaj: 'It will be all right if you don't feel egotism, if you don't have the vain feeling: "I am giving a *lecture*. Listen to me"' (633). 'I hope I shall not have to put up a *signboard*, like Shashadhar or Krishnaprasanna Sen, announcing my *lectures*' (933). Sri Ramakrishna used the word 'lecture' in place of the word 'upasana' while referring to the talks at the Brahmo Samaj: 'Do they only give *lectures* in the Brahmo Samaj? Or do they also meditate? I understand that they call their service in the temple "upasana"' (377). 'One can teach others if one receives that command from God after seeing Him. Before that one should not *lecture*' (158). Once Sri Ramakrishna said to his dear Narendra too about 'lecturing': 'What can you achieve by mere *lecturing* and scholarship without discrimination and dispassion? ... First of all set up God in the shrine of your heart, and then deliver *lectures* as much as you like' (125).

During Sri Ramakrishna's time young people were habituated to frequently use the word 'science'. So Sri Ramakrishna off and on uttered this word in his conversations: 'Books, scriptures, and *science* appear as mere dirt and straw after the realization of God' (646). 'It is not mentioned in his *science* that God can take human form; so

how can he believe it?' (864). 'You have just noticed the effect of divine ecstasy. What does your *science* say about that?' (885). 'Can I do anything myself in that mood? What do you think of this state? If you think it is a hoax, then I should say that your study of *science* and all that is bosh!' (891). 'What does your *science* say? This combined with this produces that; that combined with that produces this. One is more likely to lose consciousness by contemplating those things—by handling material things too much' (915–6). 'That knowledge means the knowledge of the physical world, the knowledge of *science*' (918).

Funny Pronunciation

Sometimes devotees had to be alert regarding Sri Ramakrishna's pronunciation of many English words. They laughed at his funny pronunciation and like a little boy even the Master used to enjoy it. He pronounced the word 'philosophy' as 'phialasophy'. He said to pundit Shashadhar: 'What good is there in the study of *philosophy* [*phialasophy*]?' (484). But again, in the course of his advice about the way to realize God to the Brahmo devotee Jnan Choudhury, he pronounced the word rightly: 'Your *philosophy* is mere speculation. It only reasons. God cannot be realized that way' (183).

Sri Ramakrishna used to pronounce 'sergeant' as 'surgeon'. 'If you want to see the *sergeant* [*surgeon*], however, you must pray to him: "Sir, please turn the light on your own face. Let me see you"' (174). Sri Ramakrishna used to address 'society' as 'suciety': 'If one is able somehow to reach Calcutta, one can see the Maidan and the museum [he actually said *suciety* meaning the Asiatic Society's Museum] and other places too' (468). 'I said to Her, "Mother, Hriday asks me to tell You about my illness." I could not proceed farther. At once there flashed into my mind the Museum of the Asiatic Society [*suciety*], and a human skeleton

strung together with wire. I said to Her, "Please tighten the wire of my body like that, so that I may go about singing Your name and glories"' (871).

To Sri Ramakrishna 'under' became 'onder'. 'You may feel a thousand times that it is all magic; but you are still *under* [*onder*] the control of the Divine Mother. You cannot escape Her. You are not free. You must do what She makes you do' (460). 'At first Hriday asked me—I was then *under* [*onder*] his control—to pray to the Mother for powers' (871).

The word 'refine' was nothing but 'ray-fine' to Sri Ramakrishna. 'Once, a Baul came here. I asked him, "Have you finished the task of *refining* [*ray-fining*] the syrup? Have you taken the pot off the stove?" The more you boil the juice of sugar-cane, the more it is *refined* [*ray-fined*]. In the first stage of boiling, it is simply the juice of the sugar-cane. Next it is molasses, then sugar, then sugar candy, and so on. As it goes on boiling, the substances you get are more and more *refined* [*ray-fined*]' (513).

Sri Ramakrishna used to spell the word 'tax' as 'taxo'. 'Master (to Narendra, smiling): Undoubtedly you are "Kha". But you have to worry about "*taxes*" [*taxos*]; that's the trouble' (695). 'One day I visited him [Krishnakishore] at his home and found him worried. He wouldn't talk to me freely. I asked him: "What's the matter? Why are you brooding like this?" Krishnakishore said: "The *tax* [*taxo*]-collector came today. He said my pots and pans would be sold at auction if I didn't pay my *taxes* [*taxos*]. That's what I am worrying about." I laughed and said: "How is that? You are surely 'Kha', the akasha. Let the rascals take away your pots and pans. What is that to you?"' (ibid.). It was also noticed that Sri Ramakrishna used to pronounce the word 'house' as 'hous'. 'Why do I say all this to you? You work in a merchant's office [*hous*]. I say this to you because you have many duties to perform there' (696).

‘We [Swami Saradananda and others] were charmed to read in our college days a little of the discoveries of modern physics regarding the power of electricity. In our boyish liveliness, one day we raised that topic in the presence of the Master and were speaking various things to one another. Observing the repeated utterance of the word electricity, the Master expressed curiosity like a boy and asked, ‘Well, what are you talking about? What is the meaning of “*electictic*”? We laughed to hear the Master’s pronunciation of that English word, like that of a boy.’⁶

English-educated people were respected in those days, but to speak in English in or out of time was their bad habit. Sri Ramakrishna made fun of this: ‘Haven’t you noticed that, if you read a little English, you at once begin to utter English words: *Foot fut it mit?* Then you put on boots and whistle a tune, and so on. It all goes together.’⁷

Enjoying English Conversations

Sri Ramakrishna was not against English education, on the contrary he appreciated it. ‘Many of his devotees were in the room: Narendra, Girish, Ram, Haripada, Chuni, Balaram, and M. Narendra did not believe that God could incarnate Himself in a human body. But Girish differed with him; he had the burning faith that from time to time the Almighty Lord, through His inscrutable Power, assumes a human body and descends to earth to serve a divine purpose. The Master said to Girish, “I should like to hear you and Narendra argue in English.” The discussion began; but they talked in Bengali’ (732). Of course now and then they used a couple of English words. Then as if concluding their discussion Sri Ramakrishna said tenderly: ‘I quite agree with Narendra. God is everywhere. But then you must remember that there are different manifestations of His Power in different

beings. At some places there is a manifestation of His avidyashakti, at others a manifestation of His vidyashakti. Through different instruments God’s Power is manifest in different degrees, greater and smaller’ (732–3).

It is therefore true that Sri Ramakrishna used to enjoy and understand conversations in English. One day he listened to an argument between Girish and Dr Mahendralal Sarkar in English. Of course, they were also speaking in Bengali now and then. The topic of the argument was free will, and to illustrate his point Dr Mahendralal Sarkar brought in the idea of duty. Here too Sri Ramakrishna closely followed the argument and concluded: ‘What the doctor is speaking of is called love without any selfish motive. I do not want anything from Dr Mahendra Sarkar; I do not need anything from him, but still I love to see him. This is love for love’s sake. But suppose I get a little joy from it; how can I help it?’ (894).

There occurred another argument between Girish and Dr Mahendralal Sarkar on the doctrine of the avatara in English and Bengali. During the heated argument the doctor used English words such as ‘infinite progress’ and ‘reflection of God’s light’, and Girish’s English words were ‘God’s light’, ‘I see it! I see the light’, and ‘prove’. After listening to them Sri Ramakrishna replied: ‘All this is useless talk’ (851–2).

One day Dr Sarkar was talking to Sri Ramakrishna regarding book-learning and scholarship. In his conversation there were a number of English words. ‘If he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] had studied books he could not have acquired so much knowledge. *Faraday communed with nature*; that is why he was able to *discover many scientific truths ... Mathematical formulas only throw the brain into confusion* and bar the path of *original inquiry*’ (863). Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘There was a time when I lay on the ground in

the Panchavati and prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, reveal to me what the karmis have realized through their ritualistic worship, what the yogis have realized through yoga, and what the jnanis have realized through discrimination." How much I communed with the Divine Mother! How can I describe it all?' (ibid.).

One day a debate was taking place among Girish, Narendra, Paltu, and a devotee before Sri Ramakrishna. In it Narendra uttered the English word 'proof'; Girish used 'sufficient proof', and the devotee 'external world', 'prove', and 'irresistible belief'. The Master enjoyed the debate and said smilingly: 'Narendra is the son of a lawyer, but Paltu of a *deputy* magistrate' (771-2).

Pashupati Basu, a landlord of Baghbazar, once asked Sri Ramakrishna: 'Sir, what do you think of *Theosophy* and *Spiritualism*? Are these true? What do you think of the solar plane, the lunar plane, the stellar plane?' (819). Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'My dear sir, I don't know about these things. Why bother about them so much? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Enjoy them' (ibid.).

On 23 March 1884 there was an assembly of devotees at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna said to Adhar: 'What a nice state of mind Captain [Viswanath Upadhyaya] has developed! He looks like a rishi when he is seated to perform worship. He performs the arati with lighted camphor and recites beautiful hymns. When he rises from his seat after finishing the worship, his eyes are swollen from emotion, as if bitten by ants. Besides, he always devotes himself to the study of the sacred books, such as the Gita and the Bhagavata. Once I used one or two English words before him, and that made him angry' (414).

Real Knowing

Sri Ramakrishna himself admitted that he knew only a few English words. But it is inappropriate

to say that he did not know or could not understand English words or sentences. In view of the above, we have not missed to observe that how neatly he reciprocated and responded to English conversations of select people by using many English words.

He [Tulsiram, brother of Swami Premananda] narrated the following incident: 'The hall [at Balaram's House] is situated upstairs. One day Sri Ramakrishna was lying down with his head to the south. It was midday. A little further facing the eastern wall, Narendranath was lying with his head also to the south and his back towards Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly began to slowly crawl towards the sleeping Narendranath and began gently to touch him. Narendranath woke up with a start and shouted: '*Lo! the man is entering into me!*' Hearing these words Sri Ramakrishna began to laugh and said: 'Rascal, you assume that I don't understand your English spoken by the gnashing of teeth, don't I? You intend to say that I am about to enter into you.'⁸

Sri Ramakrishna answered rightly with ease to the word 'moral government' raised during his conversation with the English-educated Brahmo leader Pratapchandra Mazumder.⁹

Though Sri Ramakrishna did not study in high school and college, it is now proved that he was thorough in writing and speaking good vernacular. Over and above, he educated himself correctly by knowing the Reality. By realizing the Divine Mother and attaining the supreme knowledge of Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna became so educated that today even the vastly learned people read his teachings and are dazzled at his eloquence. Sri Ramakrishna is but the embodiment of the message of the Upanishad: 'There is the higher (knowledge) by which is attained that *aksharam*, Imperishable.'



(References on page 132)



The Changing World and Its Challenges

Swami Sandarshananda

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL changes worldwide have accelerated in recent decades. These changes are challenging and are also opportunities for many societies. There is a trend of widespread democratization. Nations that were indifferent to the vox populi are now modifying their attitudes and becoming liberal. Even the idea of a nation is being challenged! In order to tackle emerging problems like food security, health, and environmental degradation a global approach is required. The changes began with socialism, progressed to a clash between socialism and capitalism, and are continuing in an economic globalization, striking a sort of temporary balance between the two. The current global recession and food crisis are the latest effects; these two factors would change the future world order.

Confusion and Flux in Socialism

The ideas of socialism became popular in Europe

in the wake of the Industrial Revolution; it was a visible departure from laissez-faire.¹ Socialist ideas were still raw and hence not properly conceptualized, but it was agreed that the tragic problems of industrial workers needed a solution. According to Bertrand Russell, socialism was a direct product of 'orthodox economics', which evolved 'in the heyday of Benthamism'.² David Ricardo taught that 'the exchange value of a commodity is entirely due to the labour expended in producing it' (ibid.). The term 'socialists' was used for the first time in 1827 by the followers of Robert Owen, who declared: 'Machinery was displacing labour, and laissez-faire gave the working classes no adequate means of combating mechanical power' (ibid.).

Socialists differed amongst themselves in their doctrines for an ideal proletariat rule and failed to offer clear and cogent ideas on proper distribution of wealth, which is the core problem

in socialism. In turn, nineteenth-century socialism differed from early socialism, as the latter dealt primarily with problems of new industrial workers and the relationship between entrepreneur, labourer, and profit. This latter period was marked by political movements rather than doctrines. Although socialists differed on moral and materialistic concepts, they shared the idea that there should not be accumulation of private property. Production and distribution of wealth should be in the hands of the people, if possible, and national wealth should be equally distributed among citizens. They rejected religious and traditional concepts in order to make socialism scientific. Through speculation, adaptation, and experimentation different kinds of socialism have been conceived and applied in various countries to bring about changes, which were effected in a violent way. Humanitarian and moralistic theories found support neither with capital nor with labour.

There is no doubt that the problems of the working classes were acute, and Karl Marx (1818–83) believed that the means of production and the changing economic processes determine the law, politics, and morals of each society. With capitalism the world sees class conflict, for it leads to the concentration of wealth in a few hands and greater misery for the masses. Labour becomes a mere commodity available for the benefit of the capitalist. Dangerous business cycles continue to haunt the world until the proletariat of all countries revolts and destroys capitalism. But, ironically, if the representatives of the proletariat seize power by violence, they refuse to wither away, unless there is a greater display of violence. Marx expected that revolutionary changes would occur in industrialized nations where trade union movements were gaining momentum. But nothing happened in Germany and England, though they were industrially advanced states.

Swami Vivekananda's Prediction and Perception

Surprisingly, revolutionary changes occurred in conformity with Swami Vivekananda's prediction. Swamiji said it would first come either in Russia or China. And it came in both, one following the other. Both countries were not industrialized but dependent on agriculture and were under monarchies. Socialism thrives more where there is grinding poverty and political repression. Swamiji's perception was correct, because he could see how historical forces were at work to shape a new world. In the course of a conversation with Swamiji in 1895 Sister Christine (Christine Greenstidel) records:

Sometimes he was in a prophetic mood, as on the day when he startled us by saying, 'The next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I can't quite see which, but it will be either Russia or China.' This he said thirty-two years ago, when China was still under the autocratic rule of the Manchu Emperors, from which there was no prospect of release for centuries to come, and when Czarist Russia was sending the noblest of her people to the Siberian mines. To the ordinary thinker those two countries seemed the most unlikely nations in the world to usher in a new era.³

Swamiji never considered it right that a few people 'because they have the advantage of intelligence, should take away even physical enjoyment from those who do not possess this advantage.'⁴ He believed that society progresses more when privileges are broken. It was intolerable to him that the masses would be exploited by those in a better position: 'That some people, through natural aptitude, should be able to accumulate more wealth than others, is natural; but that on account of this power to acquire wealth they should tyrannise

and ride roughshod over those who cannot acquire so much wealth, is not a part of the law, and the fight has been against that. The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege, and throughout ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction' (ibid.). When Swamiji said: 'I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread' (6.381), he put himself in the shoes of the poor masses to utter these words, for he was seeking ways for their emancipation from poverty and ignorance. However, his solution to social problems was not based on socialism but on Vedanta, which subsumes and goes way beyond scientific materialism, even beyond secular humanism, and speaks of annihilation of human sufferings. Swamiji's Vedantic socialism has been the subject of a number of scholarly books and papers elaborating on his spiritual, ethical, and social ideas, which are based on the unity of all life.⁵ He realized that deprivation of basic needs for survival was the greatest hindrance for attaining the ideals of Vedanta.

People at the Crossroads

Swamiji predicted that the time had come in human history for labouring communities to come forward, but he also cautioned that the

oppressed might become worse oppressors if they are shorn of proper education and culture. That Swamiji was right on this point too has been proved by many developments in the world.

World War II brought untold suffering, and as if that were not enough many parts of the world experienced other forms of hardships for about half a century after the wars. In 1949 Mao Zedong established the People's Republic of China after successfully revolting against the nationalists. But during 1966–9 he organized a cultural revolution that wiped out millions who did not have allegiance to his political ideas. Russia exploited the vacuum left by the retreating Nazis and the whole of Eastern Europe fell to socialism. What people considered liberation and a better way of life brought untold wretchedness as the new systems trampled on every human and economic right. Liberators in every case became tyrannical dictators, and under Lenin and Stalin millions simply disappeared. People thought that they had seen enough of genocide during World War II, but later a greater number of genocides were committed by power-hungry rulers. And everywhere there was socialism at the background.

People again began looking for better conditions of life, and hence transformations started occurring in many countries. After decades of repressive and authoritarian rule and through massive popular demonstrations, one after another, people threw away the heavy yoke of communism. The USSR, the original home of communism, had a transition resorting to *glasnost*, openness, and *perestroika*, restructuring, and communism eventually disintegrated. It also signalled the end of the Cold War that was guzzling precious money. After years of iron-fisted socialist rule in some countries of Asia people have forcibly done away with such regimes. What one sees lingering are some

Man, after he had become a civilized being and made life possible, and to some extent secure and comfortable, began to think seriously about the problems connected with life—particularly about the Great Guiding Force of Life and Being. It was arrived at by the deeper and finer consciousness of Man when he had sufficiently advanced in civilization; it was not merely the promptings of fear and wonder which lay at the root of primitive religion.

—*Cultural Heritage of India*, 1.xliii

impoverished countries still holding on to their outdated beliefs.

Gandhiji was also a socialist, but his socialism was virtually a derivative of Vedantic socialism, a new thing for intellectuals. Marxists rejected it as unrealistic. Like others, he was in favour of equal distribution of national wealth, but he did not condemn capitalism as others did. Gandhiji considered a ruler as custodian of the national wealth, of which God was the true owner. Since India is an agricultural country, his economic theory was based on the welfare of farmers and the development of rural society. He stressed handicrafts and small-scale industries for growth, giving priority to the vast unorganized sector of the country. Commencing civil disobedience in 1930 he declared that British rule in India had destroyed morality, huge material resources, and the culture of the country; he was therefore out to destroy its system. He spoke like a violent revolutionary, though his actions were non-violent. Participation of the masses in the economy, he thought, was propitious, for they constituted 90 per cent of the population of India, which could become a large market. Large scale industries and exports did not find any significant place in his agenda. Gandhiji's close associate Nehru was a very different kind of socialist. By socialism Nehru meant 'a form of social organization that advocates the ownership and control of the means of production, capital, land, property, etc. by the community as a whole, and an equitable distribution of national income among all classes of people.'⁶ From such an idea evolved his concept of mixed economy of public-private-partnership in big industries and businesses.

Developing countries were being drained by developed countries in innovative ways. Most of the developing countries already had a long harsh history of colonial rule and recent sovereignty.

Financial aid with many strings attached unobtrusively pushed them into a new kind of servitude. Of the many African countries, barring a handful, all were languishing in abject poverty. They were the worst victims of economic exploitations, sectarian violence, deadly diseases, and dismal governance. The dearth of leadership in developing countries had given room to foreign interference that guided their economies with selfish motives.

Over and above, developed countries rushed headlong to enlarge their own economies and wantonly depleted natural resources and damaged the environment. When many other developing countries finally started to improve, the developed nations imposed new international laws against polluting the environment and sought better trade concessions. They also designed newer paradigms of human development indexes to show how poorly such countries were performing.

True poverty is a crime against humanity, but instead of working together to remove poverty poor countries keep fighting each other. This is the one defect among the masses: they are quarrelsome and jealous. This defect was exploited by other nations, besides trying to destabilize poor countries in several ways.

Vicissitudes of Capitalism

Every nation, whether socialist or otherwise, today understands that capital is very important to change the lot of the common people. Therefore, all of them are chasing it indefatigably. Accordingly, socialists everywhere have shifted from their original position that the economy should be under total control of the government. Countries under socialism are rushing headlong towards economic reformations. China is still authoritarian, but comparatively less opaque and more open than others to the

outside world. China has reviewed its domestic and economic policies, which has made the nation one of the most powerful in the world. States are conscious that without access to the global market they cannot expect any significant growth in their economies. India too slowly came out of the shadow of the Nehruvian economic model and has taken huge strides in economic progress.

Liberalism⁷ coupled with nationalism found expression in fetterless economic aspirations. It provides personal and political freedom and protects human rights. Liberalism contemplates equal justice for all, a constitutional government, and a resistanceless material development for all sections of society. It favours the right to private property and takes advantage of scientific discoveries for industrial growth. Its hallmark is new production methods that replace the work of craftsmen and ushers in social changes with a shift in moral as well as material conditions of humans. Industrialism happens to be the mainstay of its progress.

Capitalists have now become further liberal and are in favour of more freedom in the markets. Needless to mention, free market economy is all about spending! Till now the biggest markets were developed countries, with their wealth and appetite for goods. But for the last few decades the bigger markets are growing in developing countries, with their new-found prosperity and huge populations. Developed countries now want to enter these lucrative markets.

India, being the largest functioning democracy and one of the largest economies of the world, is visibly moving at a great pace. This economic growth has resulted in tremendous social changes. The capital flow has multiplied manifold during the last decade and her representation in Asia's economy is large. There is no doubt that India, China, and Japan together can

be a formidable economic power to reckon with, only if they would see eye to eye on issues of common interest. Of the three, Japan was the worst victim of economic downturn. But the nation is fast bringing the economy back on the path of growth again.

India and China are the two most populous countries and both are growing fast. However, they have to zealously try to alleviate poverty, which still glaringly exists among large sections of their population. In both the countries significant numbers of people have remained poor despite economic development.

Emerging Problems and Solutions

Most parts of the world are under the threat of food scarcity. Many poor countries, including India and China, have a long record of famines and natural disasters such as droughts, floods, and storms that routinely destroy crops and farmlands. Food scarcity is also due to agriculture and land mismanagement, which has resulted in significant portions of the agricultural land becoming barren. The indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides over the years has also rendered the land infertile, with harmful chemical run-offs polluting the environment and the food chain. Industries and growing populations are systematically spilling over and thus reducing agriculture areas. Seeds resistant to climate change are expensive and water for agriculture is rapidly being depleted and polluted. Industries and societies are power-dependent, and as a result ecosystems are being destroyed at an alarming rate. The cumulative effect of all these adversities is therefore egregious.

The National Geographic writes:

Last year the skyrocketing cost of food was a wake-up call for the planet. Between 2005 and the summer of 2008, the price of wheat and corn tripled, and the price of rice climbed

fivefold, spurring food riots in nearly two dozen countries and pushing 75 million more people into poverty. But unlike previous shocks driven by short-term food shortages, this price spike came in a year when the world's farmers reaped a record grain crop. This time, the high prices were a symptom of a larger problem tugging at the strands of our worldwide food web, one that's not going away anytime soon.⁸

Regardless of which model prevails—agriculture as a diverse ecological art, as a high-tech industry, or some combination of the two—the challenge of putting enough food in nine billion mouths by 2050 is daunting. Two billion people already live in the driest parts of the globe, and climate change is projected to slash yields in these regions even further. No matter how great their yield potential, plants still need water to grow. And in the not too distant future, every year could be a drought year for much of the globe (58).

The other problems of the present food crises are wastage of food in rich countries or by rich people and, in developing countries, millions of tons of food dumped in landfill sites. In developing countries the lack of nutrition also plays a role in the spread of diseases, stunted physical and mental growth, poor performance in education, and school dropouts.

It is true that any disaster anywhere is generally quickly transmitted all over the globe. There was a time when countries used to drag their feet or ignore such human suffering. But today the response to calamity is faster. Many countries that had insulated themselves from the world are now forced to participate in such stricken areas with a helping hand. There has been a growing awareness that what affects one country affects another. Economics is not the only variable at play, there are many other factors like science, technology, institutions that are also responsible for a growing global human awareness. To

cope with the changing world humans have to grow spiritually as well. They must have inner poise to skilfully combat desperate situations and deliver appropriate help to others. In the midst of change there is one thing that endures by withstanding shocks and eventually prospering: the human spirit. This human spirit is growing towards a global interaction. Old ideas of class struggles and strife are being laid aside and new ideas of cooperation are being taken up. This is perhaps the harbinger of a human civilization, where all provisional boundaries are transcended.



Notes and References

1. The notions of equity are found in Moses and Plato, and also in Adam Smith, father of modern economics, in his *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1758). Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) forms the bedrock of laissez-faire market system's justification—laissez-faire in economics means abstention by governments from interfering in the workings of the free market.
2. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996), 747.
3. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 187–8.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.435.
5. See V K R V Rao, *Swami Vivekananda: Pathfinder of Vedantic Socialism* (New Delhi: Government of India, Publications Division, 1979); and R K Dasgupta, *Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Socialism* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1995).
6. Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta, *Swami Vivekananda and Indian Nationalism* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2001), 147.
7. Liberalism is a political doctrine that stands for the freedom of the individual and against the abuse of power by the government.
8. Joel K Bourne Jr, 'The End of Plenty', *National Geographic*, 215/6 (June 2009), 38.

Holy Mother's Concern for Common Persons

Swami Tathagatananda

(Continued from the December 2011 issue)

AN ADMIRER OF HOLY MOTHER writes: 'The consciousness of universal motherhood was so powerfully operative in her that there were cases of devotees who had lost their mothers in early days, finding even the very physical likeness of their mothers in her. It may be a subjective experience, but still it is significant in so far as the very subjectivity of it centred round her.'¹¹

Sometimes, devotees found their needs spontaneously fulfilled simply by sitting quietly near Holy Mother. Others came who had lost their mother when they were very young; for decades, they had been suffering the pangs of separation. A number of them had the remarkable experience of seeing the image of their departed mother in Holy Mother's face. Secure in the knowledge that they would always have a mother, they were completely transformed and renewed. Sri Panchanan Ghosh gazed at Holy Mother's feet and hands and then upon her entire form. He saw a perfect reflection of his biological mother. He received Holy Mother's blissful touch and in due course recognized that she was his true mother. There were quite a few incidents like this. When Swami Mahadevananda once visited Holy Mother at Jayrambati, he felt certain that he was sitting before his own mother. Some time after Swami Prashantananda's mother died, he chanced to see a photo of Holy Mother. It immediately occurred to him that his mother and Holy Mother were the same.

There are many illustrations of this particular effect of her divine love.

Holy Mother's Healing Faith

In 1875 Holy Mother was miraculously cured of a grave case of dysentery that was compounded by the loss of her eyesight due to continuous tears. She was in Jayrambati and her brother Umesh suggested she surrender herself to the goddess Simhavahini. She did so with full faith and reverence, and was cured by the grace of the goddess. This experience convinced her that faith is the basis of healing. She took a little earth from the basement of the shrine and from time to time she would take a little of this earth. To the end of her life, she expressed her devotion to the goddess and encouraged others to worship her. On many occasions she referred people to the shrine of the goddess for a cure.

The Mother's faith in the goddess Simhavahini benefited one young teenager in particular: Ramendra. Ramendra had the good fortune of being hired to take care of a cow that had been given to the Mother by her devotee and disciple Surendranath Gupta. One day loud cries from Ramendra drew Holy Mother away from her worship. He had been bitten on the left index finger by a snake while cutting grass for the cow. Dr Ramapada soon arrived and found that Ramendra's hand had been tightly bound in two places with rope. He was preparing to cut open the wound to squeeze out the venom when the

Mother arrived and intervened. She told the doctor not to proceed further and to remove the rope binding in both places on Ramendra's hand. Then she instructed those nearby: 'Bring Ramendra to the temple of Simhavahini. Nothing else needs to be done. Ramendra will be cured by the grace of Simhavahini.'¹²

Ramendra was laid before the goddess in the temple. The Mother fed him some soil and flowers with her own hand. She then pasted temple soil mixed with water on his wound. She instructed the others to make the same paste and apply it to the rest of his body. Then she worshipped the deity. After her worship, she mixed the *charanamrita*, sacred water, and slowly fed him. The boy's widowed mother arrived and was reassured by the Mother: 'Don't worry. There is Mother Simhavahini. By her grace your son will be cured.' She had repeated these words many times before to others she had brought to the goddess for healing. She added: 'Don't cry near your son' (ibid.).

Hours passed. More paste was applied. Each application brought another progressive stage in the cure. At one point two sections of Ramendra's flesh separated from the paste, exposing the bone of his finger. Holy Mother's faith in Simhavahini was now vindicated. She said: 'Ok. With this, his danger is over. By the grace of Mother Simhavahini, all danger is removed. Mother is graciously looking over him. The doctor did open that spot and that is why it came off and he is spared from further harm' (ibid.).

Ramendra offered his worship to Simhavahini and ate the consecrated food and water. Gradually, he recovered. Holy Mother's grace is infinite. Her compassion and love for everyone is indescribable. She is herself the Divine Mother. This subtle truth passed quietly unnoticed. Everyone's faith in the goddess Simhavahini and her healing power increased after the boy's recovery. To this day pilgrims continue to

go to her shrine to pay homage to the goddess.

The Mother's conviction that faith is the basis of healing influenced others. One of her women disciples had been suffering for twelve years from an incurable infection in her hand. As soon as the Mother learned of it, she started applying a little of the *charanamrita* she had used for washing the feet of Sri Ramakrishna in her daily worship. She directed the woman to perform the ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna every day and to apply the Master's *charanamrita* as the Mother had done, whenever the sores reappeared. In due course the infection was completely cured. However rustic her background may have been, Holy Mother knew the basic principles of good health and personal hygiene and gave this knowledge to others. Her teachings in this regard included not sharing items used for personal care such as nail clippers, bathing towels, and the like and not sharing food from the same plate.

Soon after Holy Mother's newly built house in Jayrambati was completed, a devotee bought a cow to provide her with milk. He hired Govinda, a poor young boy, to care for the cow. This boy was only ten or eleven and was called Gobe. He felt very happy in the Mother's house and was attentive and cheerful in carrying out his duty. Soon after he began serving the Mother, a painful, infectious skin rash broke out all over his body. One night the painful itching was so intolerable that he cried throughout the night without sleeping. The boy's pitiful cries drew the Mother's attention. The next morning she went to her veranda, sat down at the grinding stone with some neem (*margosa*) leaves and turmeric, and made a paste. She asked Gobe to stand before her and apply the paste to the various infected parts of his body with his own hands, according to her direction. Gobe loved Holy Mother as his own mother and cheerfully obeyed. The skin irritation was cured in good time.¹³

In the rainy season of 1917 Holy Mother was in Jayrambati. She learned that a helpless widow of the Banerjee family was very ill. Due to lack of proper treatment her condition had become grave. The Mother went to the widow's bedside. She gave her some simple treatment and approached Brahmachari Varada (later Swami Ishanananda) for help. The Koalpara Ashrama sometimes accommodated a small number of patients who needed treatment. She requested Brahmachari Varada to take the suffering widow to the ashrama in a bullock cart. They travelled through muddy roads for nearly eight miles before reaching Koalpara.

Once they arrived at the village, a doctor gave the widow some preliminary treatment. Despite his medicine and best efforts, and the caring service at the Ashrama, the widow died a few days later. When they told the Mother about it, she said: 'You acted as her own children in serving her and I am happy that she received this humane treatment at the end of her life' (41).

An elderly maidservant visited Holy Mother at Jayrambati. She carried a bundle sent to the Mother by Akshay Kumar Sen, the author of the *Ramakrishna Punthi*. The Mother affectionately received the woman. Because it was late, she asked her to remain that night at Jayrambati. The woman agreed. From her first days at Dakshineswar, the Mother would rise at early dawn. Therefore, after her meditation the following day, she entered the maidservant's room at dawn. She found the woman lying on the bed in her own filth and burning with fever. 'At once she herself removed the dirt and washed the room with water. There were others in the house to do this work, but she knew that they would scold the woman severely and she wanted to save her from it.'¹⁴

Holy Mother's Deep Empathy

It has been well said that Holy Mother became

the potent instrument of imparting spiritual perfection to innumerable householders. While Swami Vivekananda spread the message of the Master far and wide, Holy Mother silently drove it deep into the hearts of thousands. Each respectively delivered the Master's message: Swamiji spread it horizontally and Holy Mother implanted it vertically.

The Mother's house was everyone's house. Her door was always open to everyone who approached her. One early winter day a married couple unknown to the Mother came to pay obeisance to her at Jayrambati. They had not informed in advance of their arrival. They belonged to the lower middle class and had with them their four little daughters. The youngest one, still a baby, was sick with malaria. The family had started from Garbeta the previous afternoon in a bullock cart and gone as far as Jibta. There they acquired a guide and walked the remaining one-and-a-half miles to the Mother's house. They arrived around 10.00 a.m. and found it filled with devotees. Surrounded by so many people they could not figure out who Holy Mother was. There was not an inch of space for their accommodation and they became very worried.

The Mother was immediately informed of the situation. The plight of these strangers aroused her compassion and she welcomed them into her room. The sight of the Mother and her cordial reception soothed the wife's anguished feelings about their sick child. Instantly, she felt the sweet intimacy of a mother's close friendship with her daughter.

The Mother immediately arranged for some food to be given to the family. She also arranged for a bed and some milk and medicine to be provided for the sick baby. Under the influence of the Mother's loving concern for them, the couple felt very much at home. The wife went to the local tank with some of the other women,

bathed, and came back with a pitcher of water. The husband also felt free and contented in the Mother's presence and went for a bath.

After her worship, Holy Mother initiated them both and gave them some fruits and food for tiffin. After lunch was served the family had a short rest. They had to return home and did not have much time to talk with the Mother. They cried as they were leaving her. The Mother was also in tears and prayed to the Divine Mother for their safe return to their home. Reluctantly, she let them go and followed them on foot for some distance, weeping. When she could no longer see them, she returned to Nalini Didi's veranda and sat down with a painful heart. The family had come from such a great distance to see her. They had left so quickly and with so little rest—they had not even stayed the night.

While she was sitting there with these thoughts, one of the Mother's female devotees noticed that the family had left a bath towel behind and drew this to the Mother's attention. The Mother's face became more sorrowful.

Brahmachari Gopesh was one of the Mother's devotees. He noticed her mood and offered to carry the towel to the family. Walking quickly, he caught up with them and returned the towel. They were ashamed to have caused this difficulty and expressed their gratitude to him. When he returned, the Mother was where he had left her on the veranda, her heart still afflicted by the separation. Someone discovered that the woman had also forgotten her sari, which was still drying where she had left it in a sunny spot. This too was drawn to the Mother's attention.

The women began to make fun of the wife's forgetfulness, but the Mother could only think about how badly the wife would feel when she realized that she had left her sari behind. Brahmachari Gopesh heard her crying openly and again offered his help. Although Nalini Didi and others nearby tried to discourage him from going, he grabbed the sari and ran in the direction the family had gone. He reached them just as they were getting in the bullock cart at Jibta and gave them the sari. Again, they expressed

From left to right: Gauri Ma (partly visible), Durga, Radhu, Holy Mother, Maku, Kusum, Hari's Mother



their gratitude and deep regret for causing so much trouble to the Mother and her household. He eagerly reported his success and made the Mother happy (384–5). Her motherliness deeply touched this hitherto unknown couple; within a very short time they experienced her overflowing love, which was a lasting treasure in their hearts.

The Mother's faithful devotee Yathartha Ghosh lived north of Jayrambati. He had a dear and loving wife, had accumulated great wealth, and owned much property. The couple, however, had no children. His wife adopted her nephew and they raised this child, pouring their love and attention on him as if he were their own. The child responded beautifully to their affection and caring ways. In due course he repaid his debt with the true spirit of a dutiful son. He assumed the complete maintenance and preservation of their entire household and business affairs, relieving them of their burden of responsibility in their old age.

Yathartha Ghosh entered into his life of relaxation and luxury a hale and hearty old man. Often he would walk the long distance to the Mother's house, salute her, enquire after her welfare, and spend the rest of his time chatting pleasantly with others. Everyone called him 'grandfather'. He was well known for his generosity in buying and delivering medicine to patients. If they could not afford to pay him immediately, he would wait patiently until they could. In this way, he had endeared himself to all.

One day his son died suddenly and his happy and carefree life abruptly ended. For the next several days Yathartha Ghosh was not seen at Jayrambati. He appeared unexpectedly one morning at dawn, filled with grief. He walked straight towards the Mother's room and found her sweeping the floor. He blurted out: 'Alas, he died the day before yesterday!' The broom fell from the Mother's hand and she sank to the floor, speechless, her eyes filled with tears; she

could not even adjust her dress. Yathartha began to describe what happened. Every word the Mother heard only increased her sorrow. Swami Saradeshananda was by the Mother's side and witnessed the entire event:

The old man, with tears streaming down his eyes, narrated all that happened and thus relieved himself of the pang of sorrow in his heart. The Mother, too, was listening to everything attentively; only now and then the great feeling of sorrow in her heart came out of her in loud lamentations. ... It was actually found that the old man's heart became lighter, as if the Mother had drawn to herself the flame of his sorrow. The Mother said in the tone of one suffering from a great bereavement: 'Yes, you were indeed well-off, you had no worries and were spending your days in great peace and joy. Now, alas, all these responsibilities have again come back on your shoulders.'¹⁵

Having unburdened his thoughts and feelings, Yathartha offered his pranam to the Mother and left. The Mother remained on the floor, staring silently at the broom and her fallen head cloth beside her. She went deep into thought. Every now and then she sighed deeply and said: 'So Yathartha has again to accept the burden of the household.' The Mother's visible sorrow for Yathartha's predicament convinced Saradeshananda of the terrible obstacles that householders face on the spiritual path. The lasting impression it left on his mind helped him to serve others with greater sympathy thereafter (141).

(To be continued)

References

11. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, 131.
12. Swami Ishanananda, *Matri Sannidhye* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1974), 98.
13. *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, 375–6.
14. *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, 151–2.
15. *The Mother As I Saw Her*, 139–40.



Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta as the Emerging Mimamsa

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

(Continued from the previous issue)

THERE IS ALSO the remarkable phenomenon that sees Sri Ramakrishna's *Gospel* as heralding the era of not only harmony of faiths but harmony of interpretative commonalities of scriptures as well. I quoted Barnett in the beginning, and now we have the emergence of Veda in a form specific to the American spiritual quest. This is a 2010 publication,¹⁶ and the author Philip Goldberg has studied the evolving variegated American spirituality in the wake of Asian, especially Hindu, religious systems. He covers the impact of Sri Ramakrishna-Vedanta in two chapters: 'The Handsome Monk in the Orange Robe', on Vivekananda, and 'The Public Intellectuals', in which he narrates the impact on, especially, Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Joseph Campbell, and Huston Smith—who wrote the foreword.

Goldberg says: 'In the early twentieth century, Vivekananda's crystalline expositions on Vedanta and the enthralling tales of Ramakrishna's mystical pluralism, captured the attention of Western intellectuals.' More importantly:

'In mid-century America the Vedanta Society furthered the education of those five extraordinary minds—Isherwood, Smith, Heard, Campbell and Huxley—and their firepower, like the arsenal of a revolutionary vanguard would radically transform the way large number of people understand and practice religion' (87–8).

The text that stirred them was, no wonder, the *Gospel*: Goldberg tells us: '*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was called "one of the world's most extraordinary religious documents" by *Time* magazine. The massive volume introduced thousands of Westerners to the unconventional holy man whom Campbell called 'the folk-sage who refutes the philistines', and who 'cut the hinges of the heavens and released the fountains of divine bliss.' No wonder, Goldberg says that 'for the rest of his celebrated career, Campbell would pepper his lectures and books with anecdotes from the saint's life.' Moreover, 'one of the readers of' the *Gospel* 'was the celebrated composer Philip Glass, whose reading of it inspired a piece for orchestra and voices called "The Passion of Sri

Ramakrishna.” There is also the deeply moving facet: ‘A devoted *sadhak* (yogic practitioner) to the end, [Gerald] Heard had his assistant Barrie read passages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to him every night after suffering a series of strokes beginning in 1966’ (ibid.).

It can be also noticed the amazing phenomenon that one can describe as the virtual invasion of Indian spiritual vocabulary. Words like mantra, guru, ashrama, and, of course, yoga, tantra, and kundalini are, since quite a time, accepted by basic English dictionaries as regular English words, and Goldberg describes the phenomenon as ‘the vedization of America’. But this has also its own risks. That is something else that confirms Sri Ramakrishna’s sutra ‘*granthas are granthis*’. It seems to me that the trend evident in Goldberg’s study—that Vedanta seems no longer a specific Hindu cult—can also be found in the changes of the very names of some Vedanta journals: initially it was *Vedanta and the West*, from the Vedanta Society of Southern California, or simply *Vedanta*, from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in UK, and now we have *American Vedantist*, from Vedanta West Communications Inc., and more widely *Global Vedanta*, from the Vedanta Society of Western Washington. The Ramakrishna Mission of Singapore publishes *Nirvana*, and the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, *Jyoti*. And finally, we have *Nectar of Non-dual Truth*, brought out by Babaji Bob Kindler from Portland, Oregon.

Scriptural Interpretations

Since hermeneutics has its origins in scriptures, it is necessary to look at the insights the Great Master gives about the ways of reading scriptures. Is the role of M simply that of a recorder? What is the role of interpretation that M assumed in bringing out the *Gospel*? We have quite a few contexts in which the Master illumines this issue. These illuminations help us in reading not

only the *Gospel* but scriptural texts of other faiths too. This is vital when religious fundamentalism continues as a highly explosive phenomenon. The basic dialectics of the Great Master is ‘*granthas are granthis*’. But they can also, rightly used, tie us to transcendental realities of faiths, rather than their turmoil.

In any case, the translation of the original Bengali text *in toto* has been undertaken and almost completed by Dharam Pal Gupta. This is an invaluable contribution. Similarly, there is another translation, with critical notes and introduction, by Malcolm McLean, done as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Otago, New Zealand in 1983.

Basically, Sri Ramakrishna has a functional attitude to scriptures. Let us remember the incident of the Master with Pandit Shashadhar, who studied the Vedas and related scriptures—and ‘loved to discuss philosophy’. Sri Ramakrishna tells him: ‘There are many scriptures like the Vedas. But one cannot realize God without austerity and spiritual discipline. “God cannot be found in the six systems, the Vedas or the Tantra.” But one should learn the contents of the scriptures and then act according to their injunctions.’¹⁷ But the Great Master is never abstract and loved to give his counsel through parables, like this analogy:¹⁸ ‘A man lost a letter. He couldn’t remember where he had left it. He began to search for it with a lamp. After two or three people had searched, the letter was at last found. The message was: “Please send us five seers of sandesh [sweets] and a piece of wearing-cloth.” The man read it and threw the letter away. There was no further need of it; now all he had to do was to buy the five seers of sandesh and the piece of cloth.’¹⁹

Parables of Sri Ramakrishna are perennially popular and often find adaptations in various contexts. Along with the massive *Concordance*, we can also mention the comparable volume on

parables *An Inclusive Anthology of Sri Ramakrishna's Stories*—running into 732 pages it is an indispensable tool for interpreting the narratives of and about Sri Ramakrishna.²⁰

Sri Ramakrishna himself explains the superiority of the other two modes of cognition: 'Better than reading is hearing, and better than hearing is seeing. One understands the scriptures better by hearing them from the lips of the guru or a holy man. Then one doesn't have to think about their non-essential part. ... But seeing is far better than hearing. Then all doubts disappear. ... The almanac forecasts the rainfall of the year. But not a drop of water will you get by squeezing the almanac. No, not even one drop.'²¹

With this, is Sri Ramakrishna proposing an intellectual thesis, as pundits and scriptures do? Yes, his language of idea and image are compelling concretions. But more has to be noticed behind those explanations. The Great Master himself tells us: 'God made me pass through the disciplines of various paths. First according to the Purana, then according to the Tantra. I also followed the disciplines of the Vedas' (543). He insists: 'You may read scriptures by the thousands and recite thousands of texts; but unless you plunge into God with yearning in heart, you will not comprehend Him. By mere scholarship you may fool man, but not God' (625). He clinches on a note of amazing authenticity and authority: 'Strive with a longing heart for His grace. Through His grace you will see Him and He will talk to you' (ibid.).

We are now touching the real, the toughest knot in interpretation: Sri Ramakrishna telling his devotees that 'there is something special about' himself. He makes this astounding revelation: 'God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyan-tree I saw Him coming from the Ganges. Then we laughed so much! By way of playing with me

He cracked my fingers. Then he talked. Yes, He talked to me' (830). He also says: 'I feel that it is the Divine Mother Herself who dwells in this body and plays with the devotees' (831).

What kind of hermeneutics or even Mimamsa can extend its faith to revelations like this? The language of communication here is transparent: the Master says *it is not a vision*.²² And he also points to the presence of the Divine Mother in his body—the personal and the impersonal? I find that the Great Master uses 'Ishvara' as a synonym for 'God' quite often.

It is in such contexts that one has to think of harmony of hermeneutical traditions. Garfield discusses this issue: 'The task [of the new hermeneutics] is to provide a common horizon that can be a background for genuine collaboration and conversation in a joint philosophical venture. The possibilities for such a venture are enormous. The enlargement of the world scholarly community and the range of texts and resources on which it can draw portends a greater philosophical depth and rate of progress.'²³ But Garfield suggests a pragmatic solution:

The condition of the possibility of such progress and of such a future is the establishment of genuine collegiality and conversation, as opposed to contact and the interrogation of informants. And the condition of the possibility of conversation is taking seriously the standpoint and hermeneutics of one's interlocutor as well as his/her ideas themselves, and taking one's own tradition not as a lens through which to view another's, but also as specimen under one's colleague's lens at particular moments in the dialectic (ibid.).

Bilimoria's essay itself is a pioneering study exploring, among other things, the issues Garfield raises. For instance, of particular relevance is the genre of authorless texts in the Hindu tradition. In our context, is M the *author* or, as Swami

Chetanananda in his comprehensive study of M's life calls him, the *recorder* of the Great Master's *Kathamrita*? Is he simply holding a mirror to his Master's gospel or smuggling his own interpretive logic into the text? This is a vital aspect for the simple reason that M considered himself a conduit, a channel alone. And we have every reason to believe it. Perhaps, M could be a recorder and yet give his own interpretive angles by one of the traditional ways of multiple texting—or intertextuality as it is called these days—by one of the traditional Mimamsa genres of incorporating inter-texts in a text. The inter-texts offer clues, in the case of the Bengali text, to what M would personally have liked to interpret regarding the Master's advent, and its far-ranging significance in his own comprehensive manner. When the myth of the 'eternal return' was being enacted before him in reality as his Master's play, why not cite the traditional texts rather than provide 'his' commentarial notes! But then, he does it in a subtle way notably in the very beginning, when he stands amazed listening to the Master: 'M stood there speechless and looked on. It was as if he were standing where all the holy places met and as if Sukadeva himself were speaking the word of God, or as if Chaitanya were singing the name and glories of the Lord in Puri with Ramananda, Swarup, and other devotees.'²⁴ And what was the Lord talking about? The transcendence of rituals through the *guna gan*, singing the glories, of the Lord! Shuka, the Puranic figure, and Chaitanya, the historical one: the *Gospel* of love poised against the turmoil of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna Scriptures

Since I mention Purana it is amazing that Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings inspired Akshay Kumar Sen to compose the *Punthi*, translated into English as *A Portrait of Ramakrishna*. This monumental work signals the enduring presence of the

elements of a Purana in the life of the Great Master as facts. This text is of such significance that Swami Vivekananda himself declared that this poem would be read throughout Bengal 'like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*'.²⁵ Much more fascinating for hermeneutical enquiry is the fact that Swami Vivekananda suggested some additional topics for the third edition of the book:

1. Whatever the Vedas, the Vedanta and all other Incarnations have done in the past, Shri Ramakrishna lived to practise in the course of a single life.
2. One cannot understand Vedas, the Vedanta, the Incarnations, and so forth, without understanding *his* life. For, he was the explanation.
3. From the very date that he was born, has sprung the Satya-Yuga (Golden Age). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone ... will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate ... —he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separations between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past. That fight about distinctions that there was, belonged to another era. In this Satya Yuga, the tidal wave of Shri Ramakrishna's love has unified all (xxv–xxvi).

This is a 'charter' of great interest and also of great difficulty in interpretation. Swami Vivekananda, who acceded to Max Müller's request—rather the unconscious dictates of a colonial sensibility functioning even in that scholar whose monumental volumes, *Sacred Books of the East*, are enduring sources of study—that he should refrain from telling him about the mythic and miraculous elements of his Master's life, surprisingly suggests that what look like transcendental elements in Akshay Kuman Sen's biography of the Great Master are real incidents given Puranic 'narrativization'.

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita and *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* in Bengali are titles that suggest the dynamics of interpretation free from the apparent dichotomy between the ancient classical texts and the contemporary texts. The first edition of the English rendition of the *Lilaprasanga* is entitled *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, and was done by Swami Jagadananda. The new translation, done by Swami Chetanananda, carries the title *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*—both put together comes to something like ‘The Great Master’s Divine Play’. Behind naming there must be a significance beyond the theological spectrum. J C Mohanty, one of our outstanding philosophers, says that ‘the idea of intention, when rightly located, has a self-effacing character. It recedes into the background, and remains anonymous, pushing the text and its interpretation to the front.’ In essence, and being a professor, Mohanty puts it with extremely subtle scope—for our Mimamsa: ‘The more we need to know the author in order to understand or interpret a text, the less fundamental it is. The less we need to know the author in order to understand or interpret a text, the more foundational it is.’²⁶ M’s anonymity obviously bears out the validity of keeping himself as a *recorder*.

In these terms the *Kathamrita* and the *Lilaprasanga* remain and retain the duality of both the presence and absence of the authors. The *Kathamrita* is the foundational text and the *Lilaprasanga* the fundamental text; the former is the *kamadhenu*, the latter the *kalpataru*. Moreover, in their own way, they belong to and embody another Mimamsa dialectical tool called *prasanga*.

In his essay on *prasanga* and deconstruction, Professor Matilal opens up several perspectives of comparable nature between the two exegetical categories. One can find in this area some vital clues to understand and interpret the

naming of, to date, the most ‘magisterial’ study of the Great Master, as the *Lilaprasanga* in Bengali by Swami Saradananda. Basically, *prasanga* constitutes a wide range of structural elements that include ‘a subject for or under [frequent] discussion, a topic for discussion’,²⁷ a narration of frames with all their ramifications, which offers possibilities of varied interpretations. As such it also implies constant ‘deferral’ of zeroing in on one particular aspect for a fixed centrality of meaning and significance.

Professor Matilal draws attention to David Seyfort Ruegg’s study of the Madhyamika doctrine, in which he proposes that *prasanga* ‘serves to revitalize and deconstruct artificially posited entities with their respective conditions which are thus annulled (‘zeroed’) both as substantial entities and ultimately valid philosophical categories’. Comparably, Professor Matilal wonders whether ‘deconstruction’ can be taken as belonging to the category of many ‘philosophical questions’, which ‘seldom have any definite and straightforward answers’. By their very ‘nature’, they preclude finalities.


Extending the scope, in the light of the above insight, Professor Matilal points out that ‘*Prasanga* is regarded by most as a philosophical method by which philosophical/metaphysical theses are critically examined and shown to be internally inconsistent’. And, he adds: ‘In the Buddhist canonical texts, the Buddha is supposed to have identified and separated certain philosophically loaded questions which according to the Buddha *need not be answered*. He called them *avakrita* “not to be answered”.’ Professor Matilal says he ‘does not prefer the usual rendering of the term as “unanswerable”’.²⁸

Both the *Kathamrita* and the *Lilaprasanga* seem to illustrate in their own way this openness to interpretations and adaptations. As such, inexhaustible to both devout contemplation and

diligent Mimamsa-based cogitations and, of course, to controversies. Swami Chetanananda lucidly points to this richness in his recent new translation: ‘In addition to an account of the god-intoxicated life of Sri Ramakrishna, the reader will find in this book [*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*] glimpses of mysticism, discussions of various religious and philosophical traditions of India, accounts of different religious leaders, and descriptions of the social customs, the educational system, and the socio-religious movements of nineteenth-century India.’²⁹

When we take the original Bengali titles *Kathamrita* and *Lilaprasanga*, we find a rich abundance of Mimamsa strategies. But take the translated versions of the *Gospel*, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, and *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*: they suggest a rich bouquet of interpretive approaches; ‘The Great Master’s Divine Play’ constitutes the nectar of narrative richness as recorded in the *Kathamrita*.

We should, I suppose, focus on ‘play’, which by its very structure and content is inclusive. It negates nothing, as in a play the villain is as much needed as the hero and the heroine. ‘The wicked are needed too,’ says Sri Ramakrishna, to collect rent from erring tenants. But hum to yourself—in the midst of even exegetical controversies as also their contributions to our understanding of the Great Master—‘Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is? / Even the six darshanas are powerless to reveal her.’³⁰

This is the deferred conclusion to my inconclusive, random ruminations on this fascinating field. Much needs to be done, but not to undo other views: when Sri Ramakrishna is the prophet of harmony of religions, he is also the pathway to the harmony of hermeneutics, the Mimamsas, of every persuasion. ‘As many faiths, so many paths.’ And when global Vedanta comes, can Sri Ramakrishna’s inclusive Mimamsa be far behind? 

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Vivekananda and His Seafaring Vessels

Somenath Mukherjee

(Continued from the December 2011 issue)

SS *Britannic*

ENDING HIS FIRST VISIT to England, Vivekananda again took the transatlantic route to America. But this time he would witness a remarkable episode in the world history that had an enormous impact on the US. This had its root in the mass exodus of hapless Europeans who travelled to the US, their assumed dreamland, to regain what they irrecoverably lost in their homeland: the means of basic sustenance. Those people had imparted enormous impact on the liners that took them to New York.

Tonnage escalation was given further impetus towards the end of the 19th century when the westward flow of immigrants turned into a flood. A seemingly infinite demand for inexpensive berths prompted the North Atlantic's ultimate tonnage aggrandizement, elevating ship's size and displacement to record heights. Hordes of Europe's persecuted, dispossessed or merely ambitious trekked to the continent's ports and embarked within the steerage compartments of huge liners. Once on board, neglected, underfed and abused, they endured a week's transatlantic purgatory. Yet however ghastly the conditions of passage between old world and new, stoic acceptance of that heaving, noisome odium was their only choice; in compensation, incomparable reward lay just over the western horizon, the promise of limitless possibilities within this burgeoning United States.²⁶

Details of how Vivekananda had shared a liner with many of such steerage passengers, its

background and consequences are available in an article by this same essayist.²⁷

The *Britannic*, the ship Swamiji took from Liverpool on 18 November 1895, was owned by the White Star Line. Both the ship and its owner had a remarkable past. History narrates that: 'The name "White Star Line" first appeared in 1845, when two Boston businessmen, Henry Threlfall Wilson and John Pilkington, formed the White Star Line of Boston Packets. ... Pilkington and Wilson advertised their shipping firm in the Liverpool newspapers: at the time the White Star company only served a handful of ports along the eastern American seaboard.'²⁸ Leaving the greater history of the company, which includes embarking on new routes stretching to Australia, maintaining a small fleet of clippers, undergoing slight change in name, and replacement of Pilkington by a new entrant—James Chambers in 1863—we shall look into what concerns us most.

Everything did not go the way Wilson and Chambers had planned and, despite joining forces with two other companies, the Black Ball and the Eagle Lines, 'financial problems plagued the new conglomerate' (ibid.). In immediate consequence 'the company's assets were taken over by the Royal Bank of Liverpool' in 1866, and 'when the bank failed in 1867, White Star was forced into bankruptcy, having an outstanding debt of £527,000. In January 1868 Thomas Henry Ismay, a thirty-one year old shipowner from Liverpool, bought the line for £1000' (103–4).



Liverpool harbour at the end of the nineteenth century

Ismay's move was backed by his timely guess that 'there were far greater profits to be made in the transatlantic passenger service, bringing emigrants from the Old World to the New and shuttling wealthier passengers back and forth between the two.' Therefore, 'when the White Star was offered for sale he moved quickly to acquire it, and renamed it The Oceanic Steam Navigation Company. He kept the house flag, a red swallowtail burgee sporting a single large white star, and the company continued to be known to the public as the White Star Line.' Records say that 'almost immediately Ismay set about creating a niche for the White Star by drawing up plans for liners that would be fast, and by the standard of the day, extraordinarily luxurious' (104). With such ambition in mind 'Ismay ordered a pair of new 5,000-ton ships from Harland and Wolf in 1874, the *Britannic* and *Germanic*, both capable of reaching 19 knots and crossing the Atlantic in less than seven and half days' (108). The White Star Line had earlier entered the North Atlantic passenger trade with their first service from Liverpool to New York on 2 March 1871. High standard of passenger facilities, particularly to the steerage passengers, made their ships instantly popular.

The *Britannic*, as we just saw, was launched in 1874. Her initial name during the construction was *Hellenic*, which later was changed to *Britannic*. To improve her service speed, the *Britannic* was initially fitted with an adjustable propeller shaft, but without having the required success the adjustable shaft was later removed in 1876. How-

ever, during her advent, the *Britannic* was the largest ship afloat next to the *Great Eastern*.

She had in all three decks, two of which were made of iron, covered with a planking of wood. The hull was divided into eight watertight compartments, or bulkheads, extending from the upper deck to the keel. An iron covering, called a 'turtle back' protected the vessel forward and aft. The main saloon was situated amidships together with the first-class state rooms. They were entered from the middle deck-house. The stairs leading down to them and to the promenade deck above was unusually wide and easy. Along the upper decks were iron houses for the officers and the engineers' cabins, in addition to cooking galleys, icehouses, smoking-rooms, and other conveniences. From the deck to the main saloon she had a handsome and commodious stairway. The upper portion at the entrance formed a large room, like a lobby, which was furnished with sofas and chairs, and abutting on this compartment was the smoking-room, decorated and fitted in a luxurious style. The grand saloon was situated on the main deck, extending across the ship with a diameter of 73 feet by 43 feet. The saloon was lighted from above by a large skylight, in addition to the ordinary port lights. Two hundred persons could be seated in the saloon which had five rows of tables. The saloon

was heated by a large open fire-place as well as by hot air, and was furnished with a piano and library. Every portion of the vessel was thoroughly ventilated and hot or cold air could be driven to every stateroom by means of a large fan worked by steam. The promenade deck for the first-class passengers was 168 feet long by 40 feet wide. The sleeping cabins were situated immediately before and abaft the saloon, and accommodated two passengers each, though a few family rooms were also provided. The sleeping-rooms were fitted with every convenience and were well ventilated and lighted. Under the first-class cabins and communicating with them by an easy staircase, were bathrooms, barber shop, rooms for servants, and steward's wine cellars and storerooms, baggage compartments, mailroom, and an iron-room for spice. The promenade-deck for the first-class passengers was 168 feet long by 40 feet wide, and was on top of the middle house. It had in it a deck-house containing a light and spacious saloon for ladies.²⁹

As regards a few more features, we may add that the *Britannic* was fitted with four pole-masts, carrying a large spread of canvas, and had four cylinder compound inverted engines of 800 nominal and 4,000 effective horse powers with eight boilers, thirty-two furnaces, and two funnels. Both the engines, reported to be entirely unconnected with each other, were fitted with two pair of cylinders with a diameter of 48 and 83 inches, which gave a 60 inch stroke of piston. The length of the vessel from stern to stern was 455 feet; with breadth and depth of 45 feet and 34 feet respectively. The registered tonnage and gross tonnage were about 4,750 and 5,080.

Around eight years before Swami Vivekananda boarded the *Britannic*, the ship had had an accident. On 23 May 1887 the *New*

York Times gave an elaborate account of the incident: 'A collision between the great steamers the *Britannic* and the *Celtic*, both of the White Star Line, occurred about 350 miles east of Sandy Hook in a thick fog Thursday [May 19] afternoon about 5:25 o'clock. The *Celtic* was coming to New-York [*sic*] and the *Britannic* was on the second day of her journey to Liverpool. The *Celtic* struck the *Britannic* three times on the side, cutting a big hole in her beneath the water line and inflicting other serious damage to both vessels.'³⁰ The report went on to include eye witness accounts and loss of human lives and injuries sustained. But whatever might have been their physical damages, both the ships, as the available record shows, could resume their transatlantic voyages again from July 1887.³¹

Record further shows that when, leaving Liverpool on 21 June 1899, the *Britannic* reached New York on 30 June; she ceased to run on that route any more. Sometime during 1899 she was requisitioned as a Boer War transport; and in November 1900 got a white coat for a voyage to represent Great Britain at the inauguration of Australian Commonwealth. No other information is available till the *Britannic* was condemned following an examination at Belfast in October

Docks, East River, New York (c.1897)





Landing at Ellis Island

1902, no more than three months, ironically, since the swami left the earth. According to the last available news, the *Britannic* was finally sold as scrap in 1903 for a sum of 11,500 pounds sterling and towed to Hamburg (ibid.).

The Journey

With the swami on board, the *Britannic* reached New York, Ellis Island to be more precise, on 6 December 1895. A day before he wrote to Alberta Sturges: ‘The steamer is standing at anchor on account of fog. The purser has very kindly given me a whole cabin by myself. Every Hindu is a Raja, they think, and are very polite—and the charm will break, of course, when they find that the Raja is penniless!’³² In another letter from the same voyage, with no mention of its date, he wrote to E T Sturdy:

So far the journey has been very beautiful. The purser has been very

kind to me and gave me a cabin to myself. The only difficulty is the food—meat, meat, meat. Today they have promised to give me some vegetables.

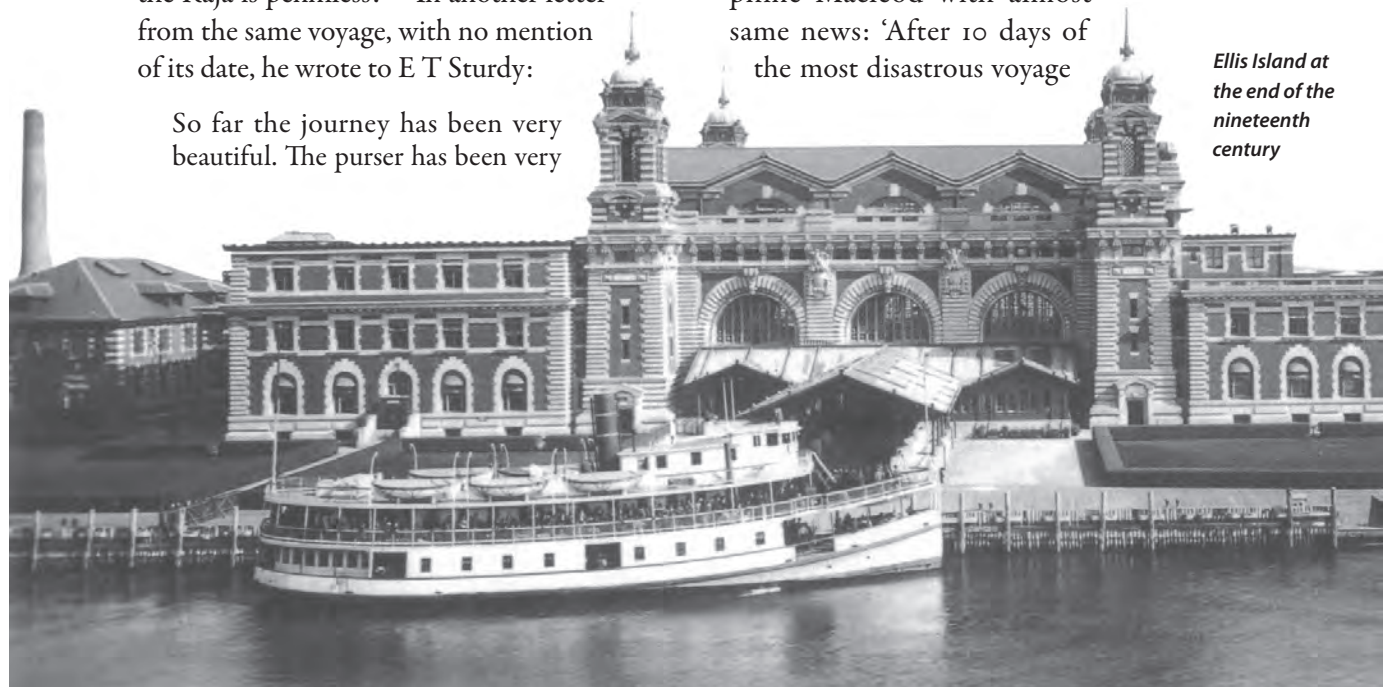
We are standing at anchor now. The fog is too thick to allow the ship to proceed. So I take this opportunity to write a few letters.

It is a queer fog almost impenetrable though the sun is shining bright and cheerful’ (8.358–9).

Settled in New York, on 8 December, Vivekananda informed Sturdy of his immediate address as well as his plan: ‘After ten days of a most tedious and rough voyage I safely arrived in New York. My friends had already engaged some rooms at the above [228 West 39th Street] where I am living now and intend to hold classes ere long’ (8.359). Thus, we know that unlike his first peaceful transatlantic voyage on the *Touraine*, the reverse journey was otherwise. In his letter to Sara Bull on 8 December, the swami was more specific: ‘I arrived last Friday after ten days of a very tedious voyage. It was awfully rough and for the first time in my life I was very badly seasick’ (6.352).

The third letter of 8 December went to Josephine Macleod with almost same news: ‘After 10 days of the most disastrous voyage

Ellis Island at the end of the nineteenth century



I ever had I arrived in New York. I was so sick for days together. After the clean and beautiful cities of Europe, New York appears very dirty and miserable. I am going to begin work next Monday' (8.360).

Giving a clear account of how this voyage ended, Marie Louise Burke writes: 'On Friday, December 6, at 4:24 a.m., the *Brittanic* [*sic*] at last crossed Sandy Hook Bar outside the harbor of New York. The temperature was six degrees below freezing and a sharp wind was blowing, but the sky was clear and the sun rising when, after the usual long stop at the quarantine station at Ellis Island, the ship was piloted toward the docks of Manhattan.'³³

This time the swami was well set to give a permanent shape to his Vedanta work in America.

The Interlude

In his letter to Christine Greenstidel on 8 December 1895, Swamiji was more specific of his plans: 'I am once more on American Soil and have taken lodgings at 228 W. 39, where I begin work from Monday next [9 December]. Sometime after Christmas I intend to make a tour through Detroit and Chicago.'³⁴ This time his disciples and admirers had arranged for a competent stenographer, J J Goodwin, to record his speeches. On 20 December 1895 Swamiji wrote to Alasinga Perumal: 'They have engaged a stenographer now to take down all the talks in my classes.'³⁵ His next schedule includes class lectures and question-answer sessions in the newly established Vedanta Centre in New York, which also served as his residence. This excludes lectures and classes held outside, as per arrangements made by his friends and admirers. The *New York*



New York City, looking up Broadway from corner of John St (c.1895)

Herald writes on 19 January 1896: 'The work of the Hindoo in this country consists at present in giving free lectures and holding free classes, initiating disciples and conducting a large correspondence.'³⁶ Swamiji's public lectures in New York ended on 23 February 1896 and on Tuesday, 3 March he left for Detroit, where he remained for around two weeks, gave three public lectures, and took twenty-two classes. The next stop was in and around Boston, where he remained for two weeks during the second half of March. This time he gave seven public lectures, including an invited one within the Harvard University before leaving Boston on 30 March. This sojourn in and around Boston was a remarkable feat in his entire career in the US, as he made an indelible impact on the contemporary intellectual luminaries.

From Boston Vivekananda went to Chicago and, finally, reached New York just before the middle of April, with his health showing signs of the palpable impact of the preceding work. His first visit to America came to its end, and a great many persons who meanwhile had the fortune of meeting him had 'all regarded him as the embodiment of Highest Consciousness, as one speaking with authority, having realized the Divinity he preached. His hands raised in continual benediction, his voice murmuring or thundering the Gospel of Vedanta, his face beaming with love and goodwill, Swami Vivekananda lives in the memory of America as the man with message, "one who walked with God".'³⁷

But immediately before he left for England, he was physically not in a good state. The day before his journey he wrote to the Hale Sisters: 'I arrived safe on Sunday [12 April] and on account of illness could not write earlier. I sail on board the White Star Line *Germanic* tomorrow at 12 noon.'³⁸

On 14 April Swamiji also had written another letter to Sara Bull with an important postscript: 'I shall sail tomorrow, expecting to see you in England. In the meanwhile I leave everything here to your care!'³⁹

His leaving the US coast has an unmatched description in the writings of Marie Louise Burke:

And at noon on Wednesday, April 15, 1896, the S.S. *Germanic* sailed from the foot of West Tenth Street with Swamiji aboard. Standing on deck, he waved a *gerua* scarf for 'as long as the eye could follow' to the many students and friends who had come to see him off. Thus his first visit to America came to an end. All told, he had spent less than two and a half years on American soil—years that hundreds of Americans would never forget and that he himself had found particularly fruitful (4.135).

(To be continued)

Notes and References

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28. *The Age of Cunard: A Transatlantic History 1839–2003*, 103.
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34. *Complete Works*, 9.72.
35. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.59.
36. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 3.408.
37. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.93–4.
38. *Complete Works*, 8.376.
39. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 4.134.

(Continued from page 109)

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2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.3.
3. See M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 212.
4. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 874.
5. *Gospel*, 294.
6. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 835.
7. *Gospel*, 138.
8. Swami Prabhananda, *Balaram Bhavan Theke Balaram Mandir* (Kolkata: Balaram Mandir, 2006), 47.
9. See *Gospel*, 457.

An Enquiry into the Strength of Law

Prof. N L Mitra

(Continued from the previous issue)

Relation between Law and Morality

IN THE NUREMBURG TRIAL 'law', in its two strongest forms, positive and normative, clashed in the form of a debate between H L A Hart and Lon Fuller. The former took up the cause of positive and the latter of normative jurisprudence. The Convention on Genocide was not even formalized in 1946 when the trial on War Crimes started. Hart, a positivist philosopher, did not find any legality in the trial, which to him was simply a demonstration of Allied powers to emasculate the vanquished. On the other hand, Lon Fuller argued that the principle of humanity ought to be higher than a formalized positive law and was enough to justify the trial. Thus, an offence against humanity was so fundamental to the existence to humanity that a formal statutory code was not essential. It was, according to Lon Fuller, per se an offence against entire humanity, even though a hard law did not exist.¹⁸

The ability of exercising physical force for enforcing law was the initial strength of what was ordered to be obeyed. In its prehistoric origins, a tribe or a clan, when faced with the stupendous forces of nature, reacted in conceiving and evolving different supernatural powers behind natural forces. It also gave rise to a class of persons who could correctly propitiate these powers. Gradually, such 'faith' in supernatural powers gave rise to religion. What propels humans to be obedient to law and where does this obedience come from? Do such responses remain static over time? Does obedience come from external threat of political power or does it come from

'faith' in a supernatural power, or was it from the limitation to rationality? If enforceability of law is only external, why is yesterday's law to be completely repealed today? For instance, the Supreme Court of India, in its recent order directed the Government of Uttar Pradesh to return agricultural land by cancelling the notification of acquisition of land for the developers of malls and hotels! Why is the old law socially questioned and economically exploitative and cannot be justified? It is equally argued that a law, in order to sustain itself, has to have a minimum morality to expect acceptability.¹⁹ The Court held that such type of land acquisition would ultimately be disastrous.²⁰ Lon Fuller even argued that immoral rules are inadmissible and are not to be obeyed.²¹ This is a classical stand of the natural law argument. Concepts like 'immunity in discharge of sovereign function' or 'eminent domain' are now seriously questioned on the ground of human rights as well as economic rationality.

The ability to exercise physical 'force' gradually transformed into a state under a monarch, and the capability of using that 'force' by a class of powerful persons turned into the 'external force' of the sovereign. On the other hand, the ability of formulating an imaginary norm and enforcing the prescription in the name of God created a priestly class. In the Old Testament Moses used to go up the mount and receive instructions from the Lord, and then he would tell his people what the Lord wanted them to do. Believing the dictums of the Lord as preached

by the priests gradually built up a fear psychosis and ultimately the strength in 'faith-value'. Both the sovereign and the priest positively charge and expect some severe punishment if a norm is broken. As humans progressed and internalized the belief of 'faith-value', the supernatural force might have turned into a supra-mental, ethical, and moral force in an individual. This is the strong 'internal force' in each person called conscience. Therefore, if 'force' is the 'strength' of law, it is external and not intrinsic and is applied through the muzzle or arms. Its consequence is fear of being punished by the political power or by God. But both such compulsions are enforced externally through a body of rules.

The law of reason, or the law of conscience, is internal and is developed by the law of nature or the natural law or by both. The law of nature is effected through a biological or bio-chemical process, and the natural law through the law of reason. Sri Aurobindo tried to establish the evolution of mind by examining and explaining how it is possible to attain higher levels of consciousness through various mental layers.²² Naturally, this makes the realm of reason dynamic and progressive and provides a psychological strength in analytical reasoning in any law and legal formulation. When any rule has both structural strength of external enforcement as well as strength of rationality and is acceptable through consensual application, it provides a transcendental force to law, which results in submission to external enforcement and inward compulsion of obedience. Any absence of acceptability to submission to merely external force is bound to make law morally weak, and finally its very existence is questioned. Thus, mere positive justification cannot make any law sustainable.

There is a necessity of law being acceptable to guide and govern. This is what Hart must have meant as the minimum morality required in any

positive rule. But that minimum morality is static and non-progressive. In India the issue of 'preventive detention' has this problem, and hence several models of legal structures have been experimented with, undergoing judicial moderation and calibration. In essence, law is required to be dynamic in the changing context of the social structure and in the fast paced technological progress.

Long after the Nuremburg and Tokyo trials on war crimes, the dilemma of relation between law and morality still exists, and the issue whether the trial was right still haunts many.

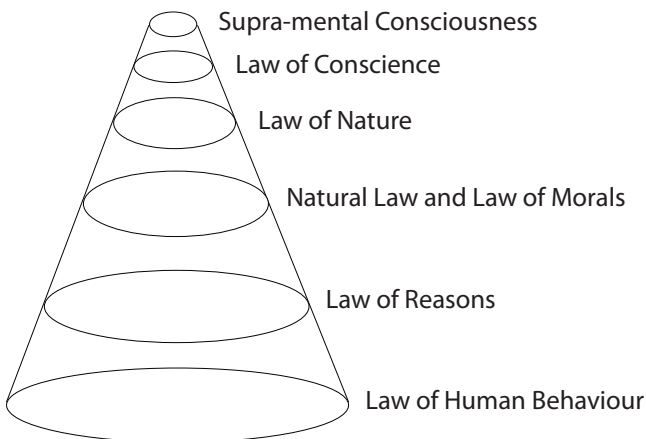
Operation of Law

There is a difference of opinion on whether law is an autonomous system or a growing ad hoc jurisprudence in resolving disputes. If a legal system has to be a system—like the Romano-Germanic Civil Law, or the Anglo-Saxon Common Law System, or an Ecclesiastical Legal System—the rule of law must be capable of systematization and has to be autonomous, self-evident, and a priori. In the Kantian model of reasoning such systematization would require for its physical existence essential heuristic conditions of formulation of law, procedure, and obedience on rational application; a sound epistemological basis for enforcement of law in proper form and text; definite hermeneutical requirement for adjusting law to facts and situations; and cybernetic application for addressing unquantifiable problems of interest conflict and possible disputes with quantified and limited legal prescriptions. In so far as the positive structure of the legal system is concerned, the above critical requirement is essential but not enough for confirming the durability of the strength of the system.

The acceptability of a legal system by the people is central for the strength of the system. This common acceptability depends both on the 'rationality test' as well as the 'expectation test'.

Rationality test concerns with social, political, and economic rationality. It is not necessary that all these areas have similar types of rationality and process of rationalization. Expectation test, on the other hand, can be economic as well as psychological satisfaction. Psychological satisfaction may range from retributive pleasure to transcendentalism. This expanse of any legal system has therefore to be deep and may touch the centre of human consciousness.

It is difficult to provide an order for the morphological system of law while correlating this order with the strength that law can derive from it. But what can be said for certain is that the psychological field of the participants derives its strength from the supra-mental consciousness. This supra-mental consciousness, through its emanation of energy, lights up the realm of rationality and behaviour. This emanation should be revealed through the functionaries of the ILS, judiciary, administration, prosecution, investigation, and other related bodies overseeing the judicial and human resource management process.



The Ailing Indian Legal System

These questions still loom large: What ails the ILS? Why is justice unduly delayed? Why is

enforcement of law so weak? Why does the judiciary discriminate against some people? Has the clock of law stopped with Bankim Chandra, who himself being a magistrate said that law is simply a farce, that only the rich enjoy the drama by spending money? We ought therefore to now shift our focus from the theoretical foundation of a legal system to the ILS in order to examine its strength.

The ILS is functionally designed according to the British imperial model, in which external force was over-emphasized to ensure enforcement of law and order. Courts were courts of law; justice was only a by-product! Instances of such a model are many: law of sedition, legality of same-sex relationships, use of 'eminent domain' for acquiring property for a company, imposition of structure of any commercial agreement with injunction of 'caveat emptor'²³, and so forth. A wholesale copying of distribution of power and power-equation in constitutional governance from the Government of India Act proves how deep the impact of the British model on ILS is. No wonder that the demonstration of power through state machineries has been excessive, reminding everyone about the centre of power. Today we find 'Government of India' number plates on cars—a motorcade with elite security personnel as the demonstration of rank and office of power. Naturally, in a democracy many such rules are questioned at various levels. The most important question is the doubt and challenge raised against the executive power in the rule-based executive action in judicial review. *Any doubt or gap in the legal process only weakens the law and its morality in governance.*

A structural confusion in ILS was inherent by the introduction of the secular legal structure under the British. Generally, the ruling power imposes law to add to its power: law legalizes the action of the ruling class. Therefore, it was quite natural for the British to bring the Anglo-Saxon

Common Law to India. But the first and the second chairmen of the Law Commission, Sir John Macaulay and Sir Stafford Crisp respectively, were both philosophically committed to Bentham's utilitarianism. They codified civil, criminal, taxation, and revenue laws of the country to a broad spectrum. Politically, a legal system was based on the Common Law, though technically the law laid down had similarity to the Romano-Germanic Civil Law System. People running the judiciary were primarily trained in the English Legal System, and procedures were codified for strengthening the executives of the state. Thus, the ILS has a body of Civil Law, a brain from Common Law, and hands of imperial power. Through this combination society was governed by Hindu and Islamic ecclesiastical systems in their societal affairs of marriage, succession, religious faith, and administration of religious institutions. An example may make things clear: one Evidence Act exists for all civil and criminal matters, but judicial wisdom follows two Common Law rules meant for different cases: a proof beyond all reasonable doubt for criminal cases, and the rule of probity and proportionality in civil suits. Even in England this distinction is possible to be made only with two statutes. The question is not whether there should be two laws or one law, but how to avoid conflict between the 'text of law' and the 'interpretation of law', which is a matter of judicial culture. A Common Law judicial culture may not be suitable in a statutory legal system.

Injustice in Investigation and Prosecution

The present procedural legal systems—civil and criminal—were designed under the British rule. It is therefore natural that some of the principles are outdated. The present rules could have been efficient and effective had there been no constitutional basic principle of division of power. For example, the entire administration of

criminal justice comprises three stages: investigation, which belongs to the police; prosecution, which is under the public prosecutor; and justice, which is left to the judicial officers.

The bulk of investigations—almost 90 per cent—are with the Law and Order Police, a division of the police force. Even the Criminal Investigation Department draws its investigational staff from the same Law and Order Police. The police force is not an independent machinery of the state; it is headed by the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, it is dangerous to conduct investigations through a team of untrained personnel under the Law and Order Police. Any investigation requires two specialized brands of experts. The first is to unearth truth in its physical entirety, which is a matter of science. As such no one can be an expert in investigation unless the person has a good grounding in investigative science. Since there is no separate police for investigation, 'investigators' are drawn from the same Law and Order Police department, to be admitted into which no specialized qualification is necessary. Besides, in the police training college not more than 15–18 per cent of the scheduled time is allocated to investigative and forensic science.

The investigative police require special qualification at the entry level, special education and training, special analytical skills, and a deeper appreciation as to matters of proof. But most of India's criminal justice fails on the first level of procedural requirements. The police are not free agents of investigation and fact-finders; they are only political reagents. Secondly, there is no training for enhancing expertise. Both these factors might have benefited the ruling class—yesterday's imperial power and today's political bosses—but it terribly failed the people. The difference between the police during the British rule and the Indian rule is that the former was efficient and quick to act as dictated, while the

latter is characterized by inaction and dilatory tactics and escapism. Moreover, no one takes responsibility for the failure of an investigation. Posting of officers, capable or incapable, to investigate is done at will. There is no fixation of responsibility, liability, or accountability for the failure of any investigation.

Any macro level division of power is meaningless if power can be deliberately made dysfunctional at lower levels. It is now known that public prosecutors at all levels are appointed by the political power-holder of the state. No prosecutor is accountable for any fault in the investigation and prosecution! What can the court do especially when any case has to go through judicial proceedings headed by several presiding judges—one framing the charge sheet, more than one recording evidence, a couple of others hearing the case, and another delivering the judgement. Thus, at no stage there is any transparency, accountability, or personal commitment. Justice goes begging!

During the British rule people understood that the rule was enforced according to the interests of the British, and hence it was 'rule by law'. Any Indian killed in the political process was given the status of a freedom fighter! But now, if a chief minister can argue that prosecution of mass killing was not proved, hence there cannot be any attempt to reinvestigate the case in future, where will those seeking justice for the ones killed in a political vendetta go? Does it mean that such victims are deemed as persons not killed, or that one cannot seek justice if investigation and prosecution fail once? What is then the meaning of 'rule of law' or 'principle of justice'?

Constitutional Gap in the ILS

Indians commonly believe that the basic framework of the Indian Constitution replicates the

Westminster model of constitutional governance. But the fact remains that the chairman of the Constitution drafting committee rejected the idea after thorough deliberations. According to him, any attempt to have political executive governance would be disastrous to the rural and downtrodden Indians, because it would continue the atrocities on the lower classes by the upper. Dr Ambedkar saw to it that in the name of the Westminster model caste rule did not continue. As such, the political democratic governance was confined to advising the president or the governor, as the case may be. The executive governance was kept with the secular, non-partisan, and professional bureaucratic officers of the state. Here the parallel provision of the Government of India Act continued in the Indian Constitution. The executive function is vested in the president, who shall administer with the assistance of his officers.²⁴ Unfortunately, soon after the Constitutional Government took over, the arrangement was changed through the Rules of Business, by which ministers were put as minister-in-charge of the ministry as well as head of the department. Ministers take decisions but not the responsibility of the decision, and secure their position on the official Oath of Secrecy. An efficient and competent officer of Karnataka, about a decade ago, did not disclose the name of the minister concerned on whose direction he had acted, notwithstanding a court order and the judge of the Supreme Court of India assuring him of protection. He preferred to go to prison for a month, being charged with contempt of court.

A two-tier form of executive governance would perhaps be more appropriate in India. The first being the elected political tier of ministerial governance, and the second the professional, secular, and trained bureaucrats. The political tier would be restricted to the staff-officers' advisory

role of policy formulation; the second tier to discharge executive functions within the policy framework. The suitability of the Westminster model in a multicultural, multi-linguistic, and class-dominated social structure is doubtful. Presently it has also been the experience that the political executive, being the product of a unitary power model of the Westminster form, has been highly corrupted. 'Absolute power corrupts absolutely.' If division of power and check and balance is the basic structure of the Indian Constitution, the same policy must be taken to its logical end, and at all levels. At no level should policy formulation and execution remain in the same hands.

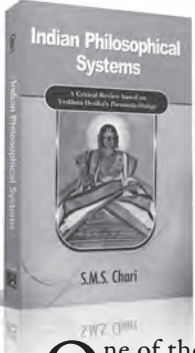
(To be concluded)

Notes and References

18. Hart suggested that 'these simple facts constitute a core of indispensable truth in the doctrines of natural law.' H L A Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 176.
19. 'Thus it has been said that law in action is not a mere system of rules, but involves the use of certain principles, such as that of the equitable and good (*aequum et bonum*). By the skilled application of these principles to legal rules the judicial process distils a moral content out of the legal order, though it is admitted that this does not permit the rules themselves to be rejected on the general ground of their immorality'—Llyod's *Introduction to Jurisprudence*, 50. Lamont argued: 'As to the structural similarity between legal and moral systems, the main difference being that in the latter the individual can balance a rule against other rules or principles, and retains autonomy to decide according to his judgment'—W D Lamont, *The Value Judgment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1955), 292.
20. The Supreme Court of India recently directed the Government of Uttar Pradesh to demolish the construction of hotels and malls and return the land to the cultivators who were unwilling to accept the compensation for acquiring the land—see <http://assets.wwfindia.org/downloads/indias_forests_and_the_judiciary.pdf> accessed 12 December 2011.
21. Fuller continued to argue: 'Every departure from the principles of the law's inner morality is an affront to man's dignity as a responsible agent. To judge his actions by unpublished or retrospective laws, or to order him to do an act that is impossible, is to convey to him your indifference to his powers of self-determination. Conversely, when the view is accepted that man is incapable of responsible action, legal morality loses its reason for being'—Lon L Fuller, *The Morality of Law* (Yale: Yale Law School, 1965), 163.
22. 'In the course of our exploration, we have observed various centres and levels of consciousness and have seen that a Consciousness-force was alive behind these centres, linking our various states of being ... and we have felt that this current of force or Consciousness is the essential reality of our being behind our various states. But this Consciousness-force must be the Consciousness of *some body*. Who or what is conscious in us? Where is the centre, the Master? Are we simply the puppets of some universal Being who is our true centre, since all the Mental, Vital, and Physical activities are in effect universal ones? The truth is twofold, but in no way are we puppets, except when we insist on taking the frontal being for ourselves, for *it* is the real puppet. We do have an individual centre, which Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being, and a cosmic centre or central being. Step by step we must find the one and the other and become Masters of all our states. To begin with, we will try to find our individual centre, the psychic being, which others call the soul.' Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo: The Adventure of Consciousness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 88–9.
23. The principle that the buyer alone is responsible for checking the quality and suitability of goods before a purchase is made.
24. Article 53 (1) of the *Constitution of India* states as follows: 'The executive power of the Union shall be vested in the President and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with this Constitution.' Rajesh Kumar, *Guide to the Constitution of India* (New Delhi: Universal Law, 2011).

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Indian Philosophical Systems: A Critical Review Based on Vedānta Deśika's Paramata-bhanga

S M S Chari

Munshiram Manoharlal, Post Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2011. xiii + 250 pp. ₹ 750.

One of the unique features of Indian philosophy is that to gain mastery over any of its systems it is necessary to have an adequate knowledge of the other systems as well. No system of Indian thought can be learnt independently from others. This is why Indian philosophical literature has assumed such enormous proportions over hundreds of years. To substantiate the claims of any philosophy a scholar subscribing to that philosophy has not only to gain his ground with the help of *shruti*, scriptures, and *yukti*, logic, but also by defending the charges labeled against it by adherents of other systems of philosophy. This is what Vedānta Deśika did for the Vishishtadvaita school of Vedānta.

Also known as Venkata Natha and believed to be the greatest scholar of Vishishtadvaita Vedānta, Vedānta Deśika wrote several treatises in the thirteenth century CE to establish the supremacy of that system over others. One of those treatises is *Paramata-bhanga*, which means 'refutation of other philosophical systems'. Written tersely in Manipravāla, a language that combines Tamil and Sanskrit, this text critically reviews other Indian philosophical systems, including the prevalent Vedānta schools, 'to prove how the philosophical theories advanced by Rāmānuja are not only free from defects, both logical and philosophical, but also that they fully conform to the teachings of the Upanishads as well as Bādarāyaṇa's *Vedāntasūtras*' (41) and 'to show

how the main tenets of these schools, as compared to Viśiṣṭādvaita, are philosophically untenable and that their teachings are opposed to the Scriptural and Smṛti texts' (ibid.).

Dr S M S Chari, a scholar of Indian philosophy, has written quite a number of books on the comparative study of the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Ramanuja, and Madhva on the *Brahma Sutra*, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavadgita. He has also written many books in English on Vishishtadvaita Vedānta based on the works of Vedānta Deśika. The book under review is one of them and the first of its kind in English. This book is not a mere translation of the *Paramata-bhanga*; it is a study 'based on' the *Paramata-bhanga*, expanding its scope by critically analysing some post-Deśika schools of Vedānta, namely the Dvaita of Madhva, the Bhedābheda of Nimbarka, the Shuddha-Advaita of Vallabha, the Achintya-Bhedābheda of Chaitanya, the Navya-Vishishtā-Advaita of Swami-Narayana, and some of the Shaivite schools of Vedānta.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part deals, in three chapters, with three fundamental *tattvas*, doctrines, of the Vishishtadvaita philosophy: *chit*, *achit*, and Ishvara. The second part presents, in nineteen chapters, critical reviews of nineteen non-orthodox and orthodox systems and schools of Indian philosophy. A detailed glossary at the end of the book helps the common reader understand technical terms that are indispensable while discussing Indian philosophy.

The book also discusses some subtle philosophical nuances, like the two types of *upādāna kāraṇa* (32), *karmayatta śarīra* (33), *kāranayatta jñāna* (34). Dr Chari's scholarship exposes the source of the fundamental conflicts among the Vedānta schools and reconciles the apparent conflicts, in the light of Vishishtadvaita, between the *bheda-shruti*s and the *abheda-shruti*s of the Upanishads

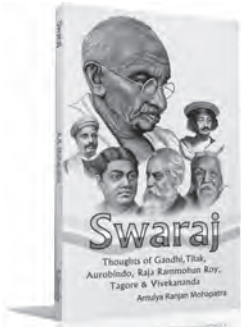
with regard to the relationship between jiva, jagat, and Brahman.

Reading this volume is like seeing the Indian philosophical systems through the lens of the Vishishtadvaita school, and Dr Chari, with his Vishishtadvaita leaning, does a good job in establishing the soundness and supremacy of this system.

However, in some places in the book it is not clear whether a particular view is Vedanta Deshika's or Dr Chari's own. The book's presentation is marred by as many as sixty-two printing mistakes, as far as we were able to identify.

In spite of these small limitations, this volume undoubtedly facilitates a deeper understanding of Indian philosophy in general and Vishishtadvaita Vedanta in particular.

Brahmachari Isharupachaitanya
Belur Math



**Swaraj: Thoughts of
Gandhi, Tilak, Aurobindo,
Raja Rammohun Roy, Tagore
& Vivekananda**

Amulya Ranjan Mohapatra

Readworthy Publications, A-18,
Mohan Garden, New Delhi 110 059.
Website: readworthypub.com. 2009.
102 pp. ₹ 120.

Swaraj, self-rule, is a multidimensional concept that has always been associated with political freedom. This book takes a contrarian and holistic view of Swaraj by exploring its many facets. It has been equated with Mahatma Gandhi's 'self-rule', Bal Gangadhar Tilak's 'birthright for freedom', Aurobindo's 'Sanatana Dharma', Raja Rammohun Roy's 'individual liberty', Rabindranath Tagore's 'humanity', and Swami Vivekananda's 'love of the motherland'. Corroborating his views with quotations from these thinkers, the author holds that Swaraj is the political, economic, social, cultural, moral, and spiritual freedom of oneself. This slim volume, equipped with an index, could be a good primer on the concept of self-rule.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



**The Essential
Śrī Ānandamayī Mā**

Alexander Lipski;

ed. Joseph A Fitzgerald

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalaw Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mlbd.com. 2010. x + 141 pp. ₹ 695.

The spiritual journey and transformation of Nirmala Sundari, a poor village girl of Kheora in the erstwhile East Bengal, into a saint is the subject of this book. Her life from early childhood reveals that she was not an ordinary girl, as she frequently underwent absorption in trance. In spite of minimal school attendance she exhibited a sharp mind that impressed her teachers. As she was repeatedly experiencing high states of consciousness that made her an instrument of cosmic powers, her married life was unconventional. At night she used to perform complicated asanas and repeat mantras in the corner of her room—she later initiated her husband into spiritual life. In spite of not having read scriptures, her life and words conformed to them. The book elaborately and faithfully records the process of her spiritual evolution, to the establishment of her ashramas, to her final days at Kankhal.

In a spiritual environment that is predominantly male-oriented, Anandamayī Mā's spirituality is like a mother's love endearing one and all without distinction. Her teachings are tinged with her motherly love, and so her insights into the various aspects of spirituality such as reincarnation, samadhi, sadhana, role of a guru are simply lucid.

The use of Bengali and Sanskrit words appropriately inserted in religious contexts enhances this biography. Of course, an elaborate glossary is provided at the end. The book is well researched and carries 125 vivid sepia photos of Anandamayī Mā, each of which speaks volumes about her—the publishers must be praised for this excellent production in good glossy paper. This book is helping spread Anandamayī Mā's charisma worldwide.

Anuradha Bhattacharyya
School Teacher, Kolkata

REPORTS



Installation of Swami Vivekananda's picture and brass plaques at Tiruchirapalli station (left), and programme outside the station

Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna

The following centres celebrated the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. **Chandigarh:** meeting at Nangal (Punjab) on Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings on 4 December 2011, which was attended by 60 persons; **Chapra:** interfaith conference, youth convention, doctors' conference, and spiritual retreat from 10 to 13 November, which were attended altogether by about 2,000 persons; **Coimbatore Math:** procession, discourses, devotional songs, film show, and other programs from 23 October to 4 December; **Limbdi:** cultural competitions from 5 to 9 December, in which 350 students from 20 schools participated; **Luc-know:** music recitals by renowned artistes on 11 December; **Mangalore:** cultural programme on 10, 11, and 17 December, which was attended by about 1,500 people; **Narottam Nagar:** discourses and devotional songs on 8 December, attended by 475 devotees; **Ponnampet:** devotional music, devotees' convention, students' convention, and women's convention on 13, 14, 15, and 17 December respectively; in all, about 1,700 persons attended the programmes; **Pune:** three-day spiritual retreat for devotees from 23 to 25 December; **Salem:** devotional songs during the whole night on 24 December; **Sargachhi:** procession, youth convention, devotees' convention, a fair 'Ramakrishna Mela', and an exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna's life on 25 and 26 December; **Viveknagar:** devotees' conference on 25 December, which was attended by about 600 delegates.

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Belgaum:** convention for school students on 2 December (about 200 students of class 10 participated), youth convention on 3 December (nearly 1,100 students from pre-university and degree colleges took part), and devotees' convention on 4 December (about 500 devotees participated); **Coimbatore Mission:** interschool science exhibition on 10 and 11 November, in which 40 schools participated and about 150 exhibits and working models were exhibited, and a three-day state-level residential youth convention from 2 to 4 December, in which about 1,100 delegates participated; **Hollywood (USA):** two Spanish publications on Swami Vivekananda, *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom* and *The Master as I saw Him*; inauguration of a Bhajan Group and a Vedic Chanting Group in Hollywood; retreats in San Diego on 9 April and 4–5 June; and talks in different places in and outside the US by monastic members of the centre; **Madurai:** installing at the railway stations of Tiruchirapalli, Kumbakonam and Mayiladuthurai (earlier known as Mayavaram), on 15 December, pictures of Swami Vivekananda and brass plaques inscribing write-ups about the receptions given to him at the respective railway stations in February 1897; **Vadodara:** public meeting presided over by Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna

Math and Ramakrishna Mission; seminars on value education, in which about 1,400 students and 100 teachers participated; and seminar on management and leadership, in which about 100 executives of a company took part.

News from Branch Centres

Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built multipurpose building at Gangail Road (Agartala), sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**, on 2 December and consecrated the new temple at Viveknagar ashrama on 3 December. Swami Prabhananda, Sri Manik Sarkar, chief minister of Tripura, Dr Arunoday Saha, Vice Chancellor of Tripura University, and several other dignitaries spoke at the public meetings organized on these occasions.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly constructed four-storey multipurpose building at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**, on 5 December.

General (retired) J J Singh, governor of Arunachal Pradesh, inaugurated three newly constructed buildings housing residential rooms, classrooms, and a dining hall at **Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo**, on 12 December.

Relief

Flood Relief • Torrential rains caused by the recent cyclonic depression in the Bay of Bengal led to floods in the Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu, affecting hundreds of families. In response to this **Chengalpattu** centre served cooked food and distributed 145 saris, 145 lungis, 145 blankets, 145 mats, and 145 sets of utensils (each set containing 1 frying pan, 2 cooking vessels, 1 filtering vessel, 1 rice basket, 1 plate, 1 bowl, 3 ladles, 2 tumblers, and other items) to 145 flood-affected families in Puliur village of the affected district. The following centres continued flood relief operations: **Bhubaneswar** distributed 10,000 blankets among 10,000 families in Angul, Bhadrak, Cuttack, Jajpur, and Sambalpur districts in Odisha; **Lucknow** gave 3,500 blankets to 3,500 families of 54 villages of Basti and Faizabad districts in UP; Malda donated 1,000 blankets to 1,000 families of 9 blocks of Malda district in West Bengal.

Winter Relief • 2,470 blankets were distributed to needy people through the **Headquarters** (600) and the following centres: **Agartala**, 300; **Baranagar Math**, 20; **Belgaum**, 200; **Garbeta**, 200; **Jalpaiguri**, 250; **Ponnampet**, 500; **Raipur**, 150; **Silchar**, 250. Besides, **Baranagar Math** distributed 280 woollen chaddars.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **Belgaum**, 250 saris; **Medinipur**, 4,630 kg rice, 463 kg dal, 463 kg mustard oil, 463 kg salt, and 650 kg potatoes.

Synopsis of the Ramakrishna Mission Governing Body's Report for 2010-11

The 102nd Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 11 December 2011 at 3.30 p.m. The 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated by the Headquarters and a good number of centres with great zeal. On this occasion Jammu centre brought out a book *Sri Ramakrishna ke Ikwal-e-Zarin*, an Urdu translation of the abridged version of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

In commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, a four-year-long service programme was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India in New Delhi. The railway minister of India flagged off at Howrah railway station 'Vivek Express', a special train exhibiting pictures and write-ups on Swami Vivekananda. The train is expected to travel one lakh kilometres before January 2014 covering important stations. A sum total of ₹ 8.20 crore was

spent on the central government aided service projects from 8 October 2010 to 10 June 2011. A brief report is presented at the end.

In the educational field the following new projects deserve special mention: (i) Coimbatore centre started (a) a short-term training under Modular Employable Skills programme sponsored by the Government of Tamil Nadu in thirteen trades, and (b) trainers' training programme for the staff of Indo-Zimbabwe Tool Room, Harare Institute of Technology, Zimbabwe, under the initiative of the Government of India; (ii) Vivekananda University started PhD programmes in Environmental and Disaster Management and Theoretical Physics at its Belur main campus, and a two-year MSc course in agricultural biotechnology at its Narendrapur campus; (iii) Lokashiksha Parishad of Narendrapur centre started a child labour school with facilities of midday meal and stipend at Barui-pur, South 24 Parganas.

In the medical field the following new projects deserve special mention: starting of a pilot project on electronic management of tuberculosis cases in the TB clinic of New Delhi centre; a physiotherapy unit at the dispensary of Kanpur centre; a 20-bed primary health care unit by Ranchi TB Sanatorium centre; an eye operation theatre at the dispensary of Garbeta centre; and a dental unit and a physiotherapy unit at Narainpur centre.

In the rural development field the following new projects deserve special mention: creation of 11 ponds in different villages by Limbdi centre and 23 ponds in Silli Block by Ranchi Morabadi centre; a number of projects started by Lokashiksha Parishad of Narendrapur centre, like preservation of Indian traditional Gir cow, training on dairy farming to milk federation members and rural youths, establishment of 10 soil-testing laboratories for rural farmers

in Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, and South 24 Parganas districts.

During the year under review the Ramakrishna Math started a new centre at Naora in West Bengal and a sub-centre of Balaram Mandir centre known as 'Shyampukur Bati' at Kolkata.

Under the Math the following new developments deserve special mention: starting of a critical care unit and a cardiology clinic at the hospital of Thiruvananthapuram centre; a cell counter, X-ray unit, and eye unit by Chennai centre; an eye care unit by Rajkot centre; a mobile medical unit by Ghatshila centre, and construction of 60 houses and a toilet block for underprivileged people (Madari caste, snake charmers) by Rajkot centre.

Outside India the following new developments deserve special mention: (a) Sarada Kindergarten of Singapore centre won three prestigious awards, which were presented by the Ministry of Education and the Association of Early Childhood Educators, Singapore; (b) Durban centre (South Africa) started an agricultural project in Ladysmith and a dental unit at Foresthaven; (c) Sao Paulo centre (Brazil) started its publication unit and provided nutritious basic food articles to some poor families; (d) Japan centre translated the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and a few books on Upanishads and on Swami Vivekananda in Japanese; (e) Argentina centre started helping mentally handicapped persons and brought out *Ma Argentina y sus argentinos* (Ma Argentina and Her Argentines) in Spanish; and Habiganj centre (Bangladesh) started a kindergarten.

During the year the Math and Mission undertook extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country involving an expenditure of ₹ 3.43 crore, benefiting 1.68 lakh people belonging to 68 thousand families in 1,729 villages.

Welfare work was done by way of providing scholarships to needy students, pecuniary help to old, sick, and destitute people, and others; the expenditure incurred was ₹ 11.65 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 45.44 lakh people through 15 hospitals, 129 dispensaries, and 61 mobile medical units; the expenditure incurred was ₹ 102.91 crore.

Nearly 3.22 lakh students were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to university level. A sum of ₹ 197.50 crore was spent on educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of ₹ 33.37 crore.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and help.

Swami Prabhananda

General Secretary

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

(A brief progress report of the Central Government grant-aided service projects)

A sum total expenditure of ₹ 8.20 crore was incurred for the period from 8 October 2010 to 10 June 2011 for the following projects:

1. Print Media: 6.85 lakh copies of books on Swamiji's life and teachings in 10 languages and 6.28 lakh copies on 12 other titles in 6 languages have been printed. A sum of ₹ 72.76 lakh was spent.

2. Cultural Programmes Project: Four state-level seminars on religious harmony / interfaith harmony were organized at Asansol, Pune, Agartala, and Vadodara, and publication of brochures on teachings of major religions of the world in Hindi and English is in progress. A sum of ₹ 16.31 lakh was spent.

3. Electronic Media Project: The Ministry of Culture constituted a committee consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and the Ramakrishna Mission to produce a full-length feature film on the life and message of Swamiji. A sum of ₹ 9.90 lakh was spent on preliminary work.


4. Gadadhar Abhyudaya Prakalpa (A project for an all-round development of children in poor and backward areas): 174 units started in 24 states, benefiting 17,400 children approximately. A sum of ₹ 412.62 lakh was spent.

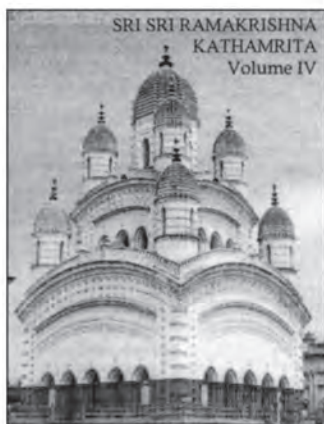
5. Vivekananda Swasthya Pariseva Prakalpa (A project for improvement of health of poor children through elimination of malnutrition, immunization of babies, etc.): 126 units started in 24 states benefiting 12,600 children approximately. A sum of ₹ 253.70 lakh was spent.

6. Sarada Palli Vikas Prakalpa (A project for educational development and self-empowerment of rural women in ten villages): 10 units started in 8 states benefiting 1,696 women. A sum of ₹ 15.87 lakh was spent.

7. Swami Akhandananda Seva Prakalpa (A project for elimination of severe poverty from 10 selected pockets in rural and urban areas): 9 units started in 6 states benefiting 1,040 people. A sum of ₹ 17.88 lakh was spent.

8. Special Programmes for the Youth: A good number of regional competitions in elocution, essay-writing, debate, and quiz were organized. A sum of ₹ 21.17 lakh was spent.

Besides, a number of centres organized various programmes without the government aid: Chennai Math published 40 e-books and launched a mobile edition of its English journal *Vedanta Kesari*; Delhi centre developed an animated film on Swamiji; Kadapa centre organized an all Andhra Pradesh written quiz contest with 79,902 students from 759 educational institutions. 



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APPEAL FOR RESTORATION

Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora, Uttarakhand, was founded at the behest of Swami Vivekananda by Srimat Swamis Turiyanandaji Maharaj and Shivanandaji Maharaj, celebrated monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Unprecedented rains and the cloud burst in September 2010 at Almora caused tremendous landslide, gorges, cracks, and land-sinking in the Ashrama. The changed land contour has damaged the temple and other buildings. Engineers have suggested abandoning an old building and rebuilding another inhabitable one.

This Ashrama is mainly a retreat centre where monks, devotees, and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna come, live in a spiritual atmosphere, and get peace of mind. This spirituality is still alive and vibrant. The effect of Swami Turiyanandaji's intense austerities here will remain for eternity. Apart from the continuous welfare activities for the poor people of the hill regions and needy students, this Ashrama conducted relief work by distributing 5000 woollen blankets to the victims of the said calamity and devastation in Almora district.

By the grace of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna and with the active cooperation of devotees and admirers of the Holy Trio, the restoration work of the land and building of the Ashrama has started since 8 April 2011. The work is in progress. We expect to complete the major restoration work of the land before rebuilding devastated houses depending on the availability of resources. We appeal to one and all to extend their helping hand to save the Ashrama. For the entire restoration and reconstruction work, we need more than ₹ 2 crore.

Cheque/Draft may please be drawn in favour of '*Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora*' and sent to: Ramakrishna Kutir, Bright End Corner, Almora, Uttarakhand 263 601. The name of the donors of ₹ 2 lakh and above will be displayed in a prominent place if they wish so. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Swami Somadevananda
Adhyaksha



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